



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





21







THE FRIENDSHIP OF ANNE

A 30
Deland

Books by Ellen Douglas Deland

Each volume is cloth bound, 12mo. and fully illustrated. \$1.50.

MALVERN. *A Neighborhood Story.* Illustrated by Alice Barber Stevens. 341 pages.

A SUCCESSFUL VENTURE. *A Story.* Illustrated by Alice Barber Stevens. 340 pages.

KATRINA. *A Story.* Illustrated by Alice Barber Stevens. 340 pages.

THREE GIRLS OF HAZELMERE. *A Story.* Illustrated by William F. Stecher. 360 pages.

THE FRIENDSHIP OF ANNE. *A Story.* Illustrated by William F. Stecher. 332 pages.





"'ISN'T THIS YOUR BAG?'"



"'ISN'T THIS YOUR BAG?'"

The Friendship

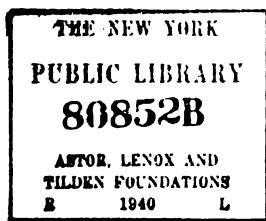
between

ELLEN DOUGLASS and

WILLIAM L. GAY



W. A. WILDE COMPANY
BOSTON CHICAGO



Copyrighted, 1907
By W. A. WILDE COMPANY
All rights reserved

THE FRIENDSHIP OF ANNE





jF

To
S. K. B.

"A friend loveth at all times."—Proverbs 17 : 17.



1

.



1



ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
“ ‘Isn’t this your bag?’ ” . . . <i>Frontispiece</i>	20
“ She gazed into the grounds next door ” . . .	76
“ ‘ Oh, Elsie, there is something coming ’ ” . . .	124
“ ‘ I shall never wear any other ring ’ ” . . .	186
“ They turned their steps to the house ” . . .	279



The Friendship of Anne

CHAPTER I

THE Stuarts lived in a flat in one of the large apartment houses that are to be found in almost any part of New York. It was situated on one of the West side streets, not very far up-town as distance is counted nowadays, but at the time this story opens the city had not grown to its present enormous proportions, and to live near Fiftieth Street was considered to be almost in the country.

The Stuarts were not New York people, but had come there recently from their former home near Baltimore. Mr. Stuart was dead, and Robert, the eldest son, was in a good position in a business house in New York. It was time for Murray, the second son, also to be settled in business, and New York offered more opportunities, it seemed, than Baltimore. There were other reasons, too, which made a change of residence appear desirable, and after much thought and consideration, Mrs. Stuart sold the country home which had come to her

from her father and where all her children were born, and with many misgivings and much natural regret, took up her abode in the great, crowded, hurrying, lonely city of New York. For it is a lonely place in spite of its many thousands of inhabitants to those who go there as strangers.

This was Mrs. Stuart's opinion, but her children did not agree with her. Bob went off every morning to his work with a feeling of satisfaction, a glow of elation. He too was now one of the world's workers, and intended to make a name for himself sooner or later that should become known and respected and powerful. He had plenty of ambition and he was young and strong. Anything is possible under those conditions.

Murray also was full of hope, although he was still smarting under the disappointment of not going to college. His father's death had rendered this out of the question, and the boys—those who had grown up—must begin to work as quickly as possible and support themselves. The family was large, and there was not much money. He had been fortunate in getting something to do almost at once, and although it was a position of very small importance it might lead to better things.

There was another brother, Philip, a boy of eighteen, and there were three sisters, Margaret,

Sydney and little Amabel who was only six. Sydney who was just fifteen at the time they moved to New York, is the heroine of this story.

She was a girl who without being exactly pretty was very nice to look at. Her eyes were so honest and looked so directly into yours when you talked to her, her hair was soft and thick and fluffy, being neither very dark nor very light. Her mouth was rather large but her smile was charming and her teeth were white and good. Her skin was very fair and she usually had a pretty color which came and went constantly if she were interested in talking or if one spoke to her suddenly. She was a somewhat shy girl, but she had plenty of courage when necessary. I was always very fond of Sydney Stuart, and I hope you are going to like her too. She had plenty of faults—who has not?—but she was a very lovable girl.

They came to New York in the early spring and settled themselves in the apartment which Bob, who had been there for a year, had found for them. It was on the ninth floor and was reached by an elevator. The view from the windows was fine looking across the roofs of the neighboring houses towards the river and the Palisades. If one glanced down into the street so far below one felt dizzy. The people walking there appeared like pygmies. But the Stuarts told one another that the air was

clearer and more bracing up where they were. It was like living on a mountain top. They passed the summer in town, breaking the monotony by an occasional trip to the resorts near by, and spending whole days in Central Park, which was easily reached and where they could take their books and work and luncheon. It was on their return from one of these days out of doors in late August that Mrs. Stuart broached a subject on which she had long been pondering and upon which she had at last made up her mind. Margaret, who was in her mother's confidence on all matters, knew what was coming, but to Sydney it was like a bolt from a clear sky. The boys were out and Amabel had gone to bed, so the three were alone. Sydney was sitting at the open window reading—she was apt to be reading—when the bolt fell.

"Sydney dear, it is getting too dark to read any more, and I should like to have a talk with you," said Mrs. Stuart. She was a small slight woman, whose face showed that her life had had its share of suffering. "We must decide about your schooling this winter. In fact, I have already decided!"

"Oh, mamma dear, I do hope it is to study at home," cried Sydney, impetuously throwing aside her book and coming to her mother's chair. She drew up a stool and seated herself at her feet.

"You know almost everything yourself and if there can possibly be anything you don't know, Margaret does. I am sure you are as good as any two teachers to be found anywhere. *Do* let me study with you at home!"

"That is out of the question, dear. Margaret is going to do other work, which will be much better for her, and bring in almost as much as we should save by letting her teach you. Besides, it would not be especially good for you. Home lessons with a sister never give the same discipline, and you ought to have other girls to compete with. I do not approve of shutting you away from girls of your own age, and as we are such complete strangers in New York,"—she sighed as she said this—"there is no way for you to make friends unless you go to school. I think, too——"

"But, mamma," interrupted Sydney, "surely you are not going to spend all that money that a New York school would cost! How can you ever afford it?"

"You haven't heard me out, my dear. My plan is to send you to boarding-school."

"Boarding-school!" Sydney gave this one exclamation and then stopped. Her feelings were too great to be put into words. Boarding-school! There was silence in the room for a moment.

"But, mamma," said she at last, "I should think

boarding-school would cost a great deal more than going to school in New York and living here at home with you."

"No," said Mrs. Stuart, "it will not. The school I mean is kept by the Misses Wickersham. Their family were old friends of your father's family. In fact he knew them and once did them a great service. I will not go into that now, it is not necessary, but they have always appreciated it very much, and they have offered over and over again to educate one of his daughters. Of course during your father's lifetime this was not necessary, but now things are different, and I wrote to them a few weeks ago."

"Do you mean I am going as a charity scholar?" asked Sydney in a stifled voice. The Stuarts were all proud.

"No, not by any means. I offered to pay the full price of tuition, but they begged me as a personal favor to them to allow them to pay off the debt they consider is still owing to your father, by giving you your education. I could not permit that, so we have compromised and you are going at half rates. You need have no feeling whatever about it, Sydney. It is really quite just. Of course it makes it much easier for me in many ways. It will be very hard to let you go, but I feel it is for your good. It is an excellent school, known every-

where to be of very high standing. A number of girls from New York go there, girls from the very nicest families. I want you to make up your mind to it, dear, and to get all the good from it that is possible."

"Oh, mamma, mamma! I don't want to go!" Sydney's voice was choked and she gave a little sob. "I have never been away from you in my life."

"I know it, dear, and for that very reason I think it is going to be good for you. You must trust your mother's judgment, Sydney. She knows best. You may be sure that it is hard for me to let you go, and I should not were I not very sure that it is for the best."

After a little while Sydney grew calmer, and by the time she went to bed she had begun to see the brighter side of the question, though it sometimes requires diligent search to find it. She had learned that the Misses Wickersham's school was at Kingsbridge, Massachusetts. Her father's family had come originally from Kingsbridge, though none of the name were left there now, nor any near connections. It was a county town, and Sydney loved the country. She would gain an excellent education, which was important, and would make friends of her own age.

"And, Sydney," said Margaret after they had

gone to the room which the sisters shared, "mamma could not tell you this herself, but she wants you to get away for awhile and be among people who—who don't know. She thinks it will be good for you. There is no chance of any one there knowing, for all the girls are from New York or Boston. No one from Baltimore or anywhere near there. The Misses Wickersham know but they will not speak of it."

"How do you know they won't?"

"Because they are very nice people. They are real ladies, and besides, they feel that they owe so much to papa. He and his father saved them from some terrible trouble."

"But will it be honest not to tell the girls?" asked Sydney. "Suppose I should get intimate with some of them. Would it be fair not to tell?"

Margaret was silent for a moment while she thought it over. Finally she said: "I don't think it is our duty to tell out everything, Sydney. This is a family matter entirely. There are some people who know of it. If they choose to tell they can do so; we can't prevent them. But there is no reason why we ourselves should speak of it. It doesn't concern you alone. I don't think you would really have the right to tell it. The best way is to be silent and dignified, and perhaps in time we shall all live it down, even—even he will."

Good-night, little sister. Don't let us talk any more, and try not to think of the sad things we have had. We have had some bright things, too, and I think school will be bright for you when you once get there and are used to it. I should have loved to go to boarding-school."

"I have read some very interesting stories about boarding-school," murmured Sydney, just as she was dropping off to sleep. "They are always getting into scrapes, and having midnight suppers and being caught by the teachers. I wonder if they do that sort of thing at the Misses Wickersham's or if they are all too proper."

"I doubt it—their being too proper," said Margaret. "I never heard of a crowd of girls yet who didn't get some fun out of life, wherever they are. You will like it, Sydney. Good-night, dear."

Sydney, being possessed of a fair amount of common sense, decided next morning that as it was clearly decreed that she was to go to boarding-school she might as well get all the pleasure from it that she could. She entered into the preparations for going away with an interest that gratified her mother, who understood her children thoroughly and knew that it was not an easy matter for Sydney to go away from her and her home. The boys were told of the new plan, and they did what they could to help matters. Bob brought

home a pretty leather traveling-bag which he had bought for her to carry on her journey, Murray spent some money he had saved for some books on a nice umbrella. Philip had no money and was earning none, but he gave her something which was very precious to him, and which it touched Sydney very much to receive. She knew that it was not easy for Philip to part with it. This was a little stuffed owl. He brought it to her room one day when she was packing. Philip was three years older than she was. He was very tall and had outgrown his strength. His eyes and hair were dark and his face was pale. Strangers who saw him in the street or elsewhere were apt to look at him a second time in a startled fashion. His face was so young to look so sad.

"Here, Syd," he said, giving her a box carefully tied up. "I've brought you my owl. You can set it up somewhere at school. I haven't got anything else to give you and you always liked it."

"But, Phil!" exclaimed Sydney, "you think so much of it. You ——"

"Don't say anything more!" he interrupted. "Just take it. He would have liked you to have it. Don't say anything." He put the box on the table and left the room.

"Poor Phil," said Sydney to herself, sighing. "What are we going to do with him? He will

never get over it, never. I wish I didn't have to go away to school and leave them. I can cheer up Phil when no one else can. It really doesn't seem as if mamma were quite wise to let me go."

But Sydney was as unconscious of the future and of the way things that we do not wish to do sometimes work together for our good as we all are. She little supposed that her going to boarding-school would affect Phil's future as much as her own, and that they should both live to bless the day that saw her take her departure for Kingsbridge. The days that bring great changes into our lives are seldom marked with red letters at their dawning.

At last she was ready to go. Her trunk was packed and strapped and sent off. Her new bag and neatly rolled umbrella were carried to the station by Philip, the other boys having been obliged to go down town before it was time for her train. Mrs. Stuart, Margaret and Amabel also accompanied her, Amabel being the only one in a really cheerful frame of mind.

"Is a boarding-school built behind a wall like that?" she asked, as they walked down Madison Avenue and passed a house that was being repaired and which was screened from the public by a tall fence.

"Why, no," said Sydney. "Why should it be?"

"Oh, I s'posed it was 'cause it's a boarding-school. I s'posed it was made of boards," replied Amabel.

At this they all laughed, even Philip, and Amabel, who did not like to be laughed at, grew very red and would say nothing more until they reached the Grand Central Station at Forty-Second Street. Here she found so much to interest her that she forgot her indignation.

"I wonder if those girls are going to school," said Sydney, indicating a group of laughing, happy-looking girls who with an older lady were standing near the ticket office. "But even if they are it isn't at all likely they are going to the Wickersham School. There must be lots of boarding-schools that you can go to from this station."

The Stuarts watched them for a few minutes. Presently they all moved away, going towards the door through which the people passed to reach the trains. In doing so one of the party left behind her a bag which she had placed upon the floor while they stood there. Philip discovered this, and after an instant's hesitation—he was a very shy boy—he hurried forward, picked up the bag and ran after them.

"I beg your pardon," he said, taking off his cap as he caught up to the girls. "Isn't this your bag? You left it on the floor."

Two of them turned at once, and the taller of the two put out her hand and took it.

"Oh, thank you!" she said, her face breaking into a charming smile. "It is mine! I should never have missed it. Thank you very much!"

It was thus that they saw Anne Talbot for the first time. She turned and disappeared in the throng of passengers now pushing through the door from which the train had been called. It proved to be Sydney's train also and there was only time for a hurried good-bye.

"I wish that girl were going to Kingsbridge," she whispered to Margaret. "Wasn't she fascinating?"

"Perhaps you will find her there!" laughed Margaret, trying hard to be very cheerful. "Stranger things than that happen."

And presently they had all left her and Sydney Stuart was seated in the train that was to carry her from the great world of New York to the little world of Kingsbridge.

CHAPTER II

THIS year of 1880 when Sydney Stuart went to school will, I am sure, seem like mediæval times to my readers. There were no electric cars then, the telephone had been invented but was not in general use, there was electric light in the cities, to be sure, but it was regarded with the respect due to a new discovery, wireless telegraphy was undreamed of, and automobiles, as well as bicycles, were unknown. But in spite of these drawbacks girls and boys managed to enjoy life quite as much as they do nowadays, and though college life for women was still regarded as somewhat unusual there were always boarding-schools of course, and of all the boarding-schools none was more popular than the Wickersham School at Kingsbridge.

To begin with it had been in existence long enough for the mothers of some of the present pupils to have been educated there themselves. That alone was a good recommendation, for in those days to be modern was not considered so imperative as it is now. Miss Wickersham had

taught history, mathematics and natural philosophy in 1860 just as cleverly and comprehensively as twenty years later. The mothers of the girls of '80 had their Kings of England and the Properties of Matter at their tongue's end, and wrote a graceful slanting hand. What more could they ask for their daughters? So Anne Talbot and Dorothy Fearing and Gertrude King were all sent to the Wickersham School when the proper age of fourteen or fifteen arrived. They had been there a year and were returning from the summer vacation as old scholars when the Stuarts first saw them in the Grand Central Station.

Naturally the chief excitement among them after greetings had been exchanged was the subject of new pupils. This was a matter which could not be definitely decided until the Junction was reached and the change made from the New York express for Boston to the little local train which ran between the Junction and Kingsbridge. There had been suspicions and cogitations on the matter all the way from New York, for in spite of any number of other passengers, girls of that age discover one another with amazing quickness. Anne Talbot whispered to Dorothy Fearing, who had been her most intimate friend for more than a year and who was traveling back to school with her, that she was sure the tall girl at the front of

the car was bound for Wickersham's and probably also the girl with the light frizzy hair three seats ahead of them. Gertrude King, whose own seat was towards the front with her mother, came back and told them that there were two more new girls just behind her she was sure. They had been talking about Kingsbridge, and said they had heard there was a boys' school there too.

"You may depend upon it they are new girls," announced Gertrude.

"Do you like them?" asked Anne, eagerly.

"They are horrid," returned Gertrude. "One of them has on a linen duster, and the other has her hair done in the queerest way you ever saw."

For girls of those days were very much like those of to-day in the matter of prejudice. Not to wear one's hair in a braided knob at the back of the neck when one was fifteen, or braided and turned up with two ribbon bows, one on top, the other at the neck, was to be very peculiar indeed.

"But have you seen that girl who is up at the very front of the car?" asked Anne, still more eagerly. "What is she like?"

"Yes, I've seen her, and heard her speak to the conductor, and he said 'change at the Junction,' so of course she's going. Well, she has a voice like a—oh, it's like some kind of music!" exclaimed

Gertrude enthusiastically. "I know I shall love her. But she looks awfully poor."

"Who cares for that?" said Anne.

"The girl with the frizzy hair is listening," whispered Dolly. "Better be careful!"

And then the conductor shouted, "Clapham Junction! All out for Wade, Madison and Kingsbridge! This train express to Providence and Boston!" And with a great amount of bustle and hurry all the girls, new and old, seized their luggage and hastened from the car. Some of the newcomers were accompanied by their mothers, but the tall girl (who was Sydney Stuart) and she with the frizzy hair were quite alone. They stood at opposite ends of the platform and watched their companions until the little local train came puffing to the station. Then they took their places and Sydney found herself next to the girl with the frizzy hair.

It was but a short ride to Kingsbridge through a country that was already putting on its autumn dress. The railroad followed the course of a narrow stream, a tiny little river which bore the imposing name of the Minnepachague. The girls familiarly called it "Minny," and hailed the first glimpse of it from the car windows with cries of joy.

"Dear old Minny!" exclaimed Anne Talbot.

"I can scarcely wait to get there. Girls, I am to have my own canoe next spring. I learned to paddle at York this summer."

"Oh, take me! Take me, Anne! I just love a canoe!" came in chorus.

"I've been playing tennis all summer," said Dorothy. "There is nothing like it. The greatest fun in the world. Do you suppose dear Wicky will let us have a court? There is a level place behind the house that would do. I mean to ask her."

"She'll never let us. That would be entirely too much fun. Oh, how queer and horrid to get back to school and have a teacher dogging our footsteps."

"Fancy Wicky playing tennis, in a short skirt and a jersey!" laughed Anne. "There are the steeples of Kingsbridge. Hurray! After all, it's fun to get back. I'm glad I'm not a new scholar. Do you remember how we felt when we first came? And no one spoke to us for ages. I mean to speak to those new girls over there. They are sitting together but they haven't said a word to each other. I've been watching them."

She rose as she said this and moved a step or two down the aisle of the car. She was a tall girl with dark, tightly-curling hair, a bright color and very white teeth. Her mouth was large and her

nose a snub but her merry brown eyes and her ever changing expression gave her face a greater charm than that of beautiful features. Her friends looked after her admiringly. You would have guessed at once that Anne Talbot was popular.

"You are new scholars, aren't you?" she said, as she stopped beside the two strangers. "I am sure you are going to Miss Wickersham's."

"Yes, we are," said the girl with the very fair frizzy hair. "At least I am. I can't answer for any one else," she added, glancing at Sydney beside her ("a real snubby look," Anne said afterwards in describing the conversation to Dolly).

"I am new too," said Sydney, shyly. "Have you been there before?"

"Oh, yes. I am quite an old girl. I suppose you are dreading it awfully, just as I did. But you needn't. You will soon get used to it. And we're not as bad as we look. We don't bite."

Sydney laughed softly. The fair-haired damsel took her literally.

"Oh, I don't think you're bad looking, and as for biting—oh!" she broke off suddenly, on catching the quizzical look in Anne's eyes. "Of course I know you don't really mean that!" and she laughed a rather belated giggle. "I'm so glad you spoke to me. I've been feeling so lonely."

"Then why haven't you been talking to your

neighbor?" asked Anne, bluntly. "As long as you're both new I should think you would have made friends. But here we are at Kingsbridge, dear old Kingsbridge, and there's the barge to meet us, and Miss Lovering. Dear Miss Lovering!"

She caught up her bag and umbrella and in the excitement of arrival she soon became separated from the strangers.

To Sydney this moment of arrival was a great relief. She had been conscious since they left the Junction that the girl beside her regarded her with disapproval. Not only had she piled the seat high with luggage and been obviously unwilling to make room for Sydney, although it was the only vacant place left in the car, but she had drawn aside her skirts with conspicuous care, and had turned her back as much as was possible to her new neighbor, making it evident that she intended to have nothing to say to her. Sydney looked at her own rather shabby blue dress that had been considered good enough for traveling, and then at the elaborately trimmed garments of the other girl,—the long "*mousquetaire*" *suède* gloves, the dozen bangles that rattled and clanked with every movement of her hands, the locket and chain on her neck, the conspicuous hat that was set back from the much-frizzed bang.

"I suppose I do look shabby," she said to herself with a sigh. "Shabby and country, though I do live in New York. But those girls over there are a great deal nicer looking than this one. I wish I might know them. I wonder if they are going to the school."

Shortly afterwards her wish was gratified when Anne Talbot came and spoke to them, but she was too shy to say much in return. She could only smile. "The sweetest smile you ever saw in your life," Anne described it.

I may as well announce at once that though Sydney Stuart is my heroine, Anne Talbot comes next in importance, and Bertha Macy, the girl with the fair frizzy hair, is going to be very prominent in these chronicles of the Wickersham School. You will all recognize her. There is a girl like her in every school, I suppose, for Bertha Macys exist of every age the world over, and it is probable that they all go to school at some period of their career.

The outgoing mail the next day took three letters which perhaps will bring these girls before you in the clearest way and introduce you to them properly, and then we can go on with the story.

From Anne Talbot to her mother :

" DEAREST MAMMA :

" Here we are again at old Kingsbridge. Got here safely and the only accident was my leaving my purse in the New York train, or else my pocket was picked, I don't know which. It only had about two dollars left, so it was a good thing it didn't happen when it was fuller. If you send me a new one I like Russia leather best, and one of those new clasps. And please put a little more than two dollars in it for in the meantime I am borrowing of Dolly, and I should have to pay it right over to her and so have none left. They have awfully fascinating butter-scotch at Tinkham's this year, and the best caramels I ever tasted. There are several new girls. One is named Sydney Stuart (such a beautiful name) and she comes from New York. I am sure you would approve of her for she is very quiet and doesn't use much slang and has a kind of a queenly look though she is not quite as tall as I am. I shouldn't wonder if she were one of those descendants of Mary Queen of Scots they can't trace. She doesn't use slang because she hardly ever says anything at all, she is so quiet, so she is safe that way. You see if you're much of a talker you really are forced to use slang to help you out. But really, dear mamma, I am trying not to. She has a roommate that is just *too-too* for anything. There I go

again. Couldn't help it to save my eye. Oh, dear mamma, how shocked you will be, but I simply can't write this over, and I know you will be so glad to get my first letter you won't care as much about the slang as you would later in the term. But about this other new girl. Her name is Bertha Macy. She wears sixteen bangles and they have little elephants and pigs and hearts and things hanging from them and they rattle like sleigh bells. I have my doubts about their being real silver. She rooms with Sydney Stuart and I pity Sydney. Some of the girls think they are going to like Bertha Macy but I don't. Give my love to papa, and when you write to Bud. I am going to write to him soon. Write soon for I miss you fearfully. I forgot my Bible. Please send it with the new *portemonnaie*. Your lovingest daughter,
ANNE."

From Bertha Macy to her sister :

"DEAR CARRY :

"Here I am at boarding school at last and I think it is going to be a success. Some of the girls are very nice. There is one named Anne Talbot from New York who is just fine. I admire her immensely and intend to have her for my most intimate friend. She rooms with a girl

named Dorothy Fearing now, a meek sort of a little thing, but I can soon cut her out. Anne dresses *beautifully* and is evidently rich. She lost her purse on the train and does not seem to care at all. She has lovely clothes, the material I mean. They are too plainly made to suit me. When I get intimate I am going to advise her to have them made differently. She evidently knows the nicest people. My roommate is new and I can't bear her. 'Prunes and prisms' just expresses what she is. I shall make her life just as miserable as I can so as to get rid of her. One of my bangles is getting tarnished already and I don't know what to do about it, for the girls all admire them so and are always looking at them. They will be sure to notice if I gave up wearing one, so I think I shall have to take off the little fan from it and pretend it is broken. I will send it away to be mended (pretend) and you can buy me a new one and send it. They are forty-nine cents on Sixth Avenue. You know the kind. It has a fan, an opera glass, a pig and a heart hanging from it. Get it soon, and I will pay you when I come home at Christmas. I think it is going to be great fun here. I am glad I came. I have made all my plans about Anne Talbot. I have got to be very careful, for she is the kind that always wants to look out for a girl like Sydney Stu-

art. Sort of protect the down-trodden, you know. But Sydney Stuart puts on great airs and acts as if she were a millionaire as far as that goes. She actually pretends to look down on me! The teachers are so-so. I am not sure about them yet. Pratt's boys' school is in Kingsbridge. I didn't know that till I got here. Sam Kennedy we met at Atlantic City is there. That will be fun. I shan't tell anybody yet I know one of the boys. I think you were real mean not to let me bring your gold pencil. It would have made such an impression.

"Yours,

"BERTHA."

From Sydney Stuart to her mother :

"MY DEAR, DEAR MOTHER :

"I do wonder how you are to-day and how you are getting on without me. I miss you terribly, and wish I could talk to you instead of writing. I like the school very much. The Miss Wickershams were very kind when I arrived, but I have scarcely seen them since, there is so much going on. All the classes have to be arranged and the rooms, etc. Miss Lovering has charge of that, the rooms, I mean. She is very nice and teaches arithmetic and geography to the little girls that

come in to day school. I have gone into the third class in everything except mathematics. You know how stupid I am about arithmetic. We had an examination this morning and I am afraid I did not do very well, but in dictation and another spelling examination I did not have a single mistake. My roommate is a girl from New York. Her name is Bertha Macy. She spends perfect ages in front of the glass frizzing her hair with a slate pencil and a candle. There are some very nice girls here, I think, but I scarcely know any of them yet. Anne Talbot from New York is lovely and has been very kind. She is one of those we saw in the station. It was her bag that Phil picked up. Isn't it strange that she should be here, when I so hoped that she was coming to this school? She is evidently the most popular girl in the school and always has lots of girls with her. Dear mother, I wish I could be such a favorite. Is it wrong to wish that? I am afraid people don't like me very much because I am so quiet. Well, I am going to study very hard and be able to teach and earn my own living, so you won't have to worry about supporting me. I wish we could all move here away from noisy New York and live in a nice little house. This is a beautiful place. I love it dearly already. I have the queerest feeling about it. Just as if I

had lived here before. I love it so. I suppose it is because my ancestors used to live here. I have seen the house where papa's grandfather lived. I will tell you more about it in my next letter. I must stop now and study. Two of my new books have been given to me. I am afraid they will cost a lot, but if we are careful not to deface them we can sell them back when we are through with them at the end of the year. I have taken several second-hand ones and they are quite cheap. I think my roommate looks down on me because I did, but I thought I ought to, as long as we have so little money. Good-bye, dear, dear mother. Give lots of love to Margaret and the boys and Amabel. I wish I could see you all to-night.

“Your very loving daughter,

“SYDNEY.”

CHAPTER III

THE old town of Kingsbridge is in the hill country of New England but exactly where it is not necessary to state. It is not in the mountains, neither is it very near the sea, but in a gently rolling country with a blue line of hills in the distance from between the peaks of which fainter and more shadowy hilltops are discerned beyond, whence the pure mountain breezes blow upon Kingsbridge. Some little streams take their rise there too, flowing down to join the Minnepachague River and so on to the sea. The sun sets behind those distant hills and as one watches the golden glory one wonders what the sun drops down to see away off in the West behind the screening mountains. For in the hill country as in life there is always something just beyond our vision that we long to know about.

The town of Kingsbridge was settled away back in colony times, and that its founders were men of means and good taste a stranger would recognize at once. The houses were large and square and imposing, and most of them were painted white. There were a few modern houses but one marked

them as being unusual. They were all set in their own gardens, with long box-bordered paths leading from the gates, beyond which in summer roses and lilacs and quaint old-fashioned perennials bloomed in delicious profusion, and in which the yellow golden-glow and deep-hued chrysanthemums made sunshine now that September had come.

Miss Wickersham's school was in one of the largest of the houses but it was of modern architecture, with a French roof and a turret. It had been built rather recently by a man who had made a large fortune and then lost it, and Miss Wickersham had bought the house with the money saved from long years of teaching. There was a fine lawn in front which was reached by an avenue of elm trees. On one side was the garden and on the other a grove of pine trees, beyond which a high stone wall separated the school grounds from those of a very old stone mansion. This old stone house stood amid dark masses of cedar and pine trees. The sun never touched the lower part of it and the dampness of ages had caused the wooden shutters to rot and the sills to crumble away. The garden was overgrown with weeds, but some of the flowers still managed to live, and bravely bloomed each successive season. At the back of the house was a tower, at the top of which hung a great bell.

The tower was of stone and part of it had fallen, but over the ruins ivy climbed and grass sprouted in the crevices. The purpose of the tower and bell, whatever it had been, had long been a mystery and year after year the girls at Miss Wickersham's wondered, queried and wove startling theories as to its origin. Only from the upper windows could they see within the precincts. Needless to say that the old Braithwaite place was of most intense interest to the more imaginative of the girls, and in the weaving of "ghost stories" or other strange tales the scene was invariably laid there.

There was one room in the schoolhouse which afforded a fine view of the mysterious place. This was on the corner of the third floor, and from one of its windows you could see over the cedars, which just at this point were lower and more dispersed than elsewhere. Miss Wickersham usually gave this room to two of the new girls, and this year it was appropriated to Sydney Stuart and Bertha Macy. There were two little iron beds in the room, two chests of drawers, and two tables. Each girl thus had her own domain, as it were, although occupying the same apartment. Sydney's table was by the window overlooking the Braithwaite place, while Bertha Macy's commanded a view of the grounds back of the school.

It was very comfortable and pleasant, for the Misses Wickersham believed in doing what they could in this way for the girls entrusted to their charge. There were three Misses Wickersham: the principal herself and Miss Abby and Miss Jennie her sisters and assistants. Miss Jennie was the favorite with all the pupils. She was very pretty, with soft fair hair and a lovely color in her face. Quite young, too, as Anne Talbot informed the new girls.

"Young that is, compared to her sisters," said Anne. "She is very old when you think of her age, for it is known to be twenty-eight, which is really quite ancient, but she is such a dear she seems as young as anybody."

The girls were in the almost deserted school-room when this conversation took place. Anne was seated on her own desk with her feet dangling, Dorothy Fearing, who was never very far from her, was in the chair belonging to it, Bertha Macy sat on the edge of the platform on which stood the teacher's table, and Sydney Stuart was on one of the recitation benches. The room was very large, the walls were hung with maps and blackboards, and there was no furniture but the desks and chairs. The windows, which reached almost from floor to ceiling, were painted in a way that resembled frost, so that it was impossible

to see through them. In the morning the room was bright enough, but at this hour of the afternoon it was rapidly growing dark, for the day had been cloudy and rain was now falling. It pattered against the windows on the Eastern side and the wind had begun to howl rather mournfully. School had been open for several days, and the first strangeness was wearing off a little for Sydney, but as she was a very shy person she had made no advances to the other girls, which of course does not hasten the making of friends.

This afternoon she had been on her way to her room when Anne Talbot and Dorothy Fearing called her into the schoolroom. Bertha, hearing them, had followed. Anne had surveyed her darkly for a moment and had made a funny little grimace behind her, and then decided to make the best of the inevitable.

"For she is always going to be around, you may be sure of that," she whispered to Dorothy. "I shall give her a good snubbing some time, but not to-day."

"Oh, no, not to-day!" returned Dorothy, who was always for peace.

"I've got two awfully important things to speak about," announced Anne. "One is about Pratt's school and the other is about the club. I just want to tell you that the boys who go to Pratt's

are awfully common. We none of us have anything to do with them, at least very few of us. There was a great fuss once. A girl who isn't here now got up an acquaintance with two of them and there was the greatest time. I thought I would give you a hint."

"How do you know they are all common?" asked Bertha.

"Oh, I know they are. They always have been. You had just better look out not to attract their attention in any way. My cousins the Tracys, who live in Kingsbridge, told me they were all cads who go there, and to have nothing to do with them."

Bertha was silent. She decided not to say that she already knew one of the boys there.

"The other thing is the club," continued Anne. "I suppose you have heard about the club. It has been in existence for nearly a year, and it is called the 'Kay Cue See.'"

"What does that mean?" asked Bertha.

"Well, that is just the mystery. We don't tell the meaning of the name to the new members until the end of their first school year. Instead of testing the girls for membership before they get in, we let everybody in, and if any one breaks the laws of the Kay Cue See she is quietly dropped. Do you see?"

"Why, I never heard anything so queer!" exclaimed Bertha. "We might do it the very first minute!"

"Of course, and then you'd get a sort of a notice. The second time, you'd get a censure. The third time, out you'd go, with full explanations. If you managed to stay in the whole eight months of school, you will be a full member from that time until you leave school, unless you break the laws later. See? It is really a good idea, for everybody has a chance to belong. There can be no influence, or anything like that, and it doesn't make any difference about being intimate with anybody, or having any pull anywhere. There, I suppose that is slang! But it just exactly expresses what I want to say and I've simply got to use it sometimes. We can all become members if we want to. I was made president last term for this year, so I am the one to tell you about it and we hope you will both belong."

"What do you do at the meetings?" asked Sydney.

"Oh, we do all sorts of things. We have fun of some kind. Once a month we have a secret feast. The great point is that no teacher or outsider shall know it is being held. Then we have our weekly meeting, with no fixed day but

planned with the greatest care and secrecy. We do stunts—that's a new word I got from Ned when I was at home. Ned is my brother, you know, at Harvard. It means some kind of a performance. Oh, the whole thing is great fun, and I advise you to join."

"Do all the girls who are here now belong?" asked Sydney.

"No. There are twenty-five old scholars this year, and seventeen belong. They all had the chance, but they went out for different reasons. It isn't always the same reason, but it is never told, and they never tell themselves, they are always ashamed of being put out, so you see no one can guess exactly anything about it. Of course the girls who go out sometimes give a sort of a reason, but never the real one. Now, do you two girls want to be in the Kay Cue?"

"Indeed I do!" exclaimed Bertha. "I think it must be just too perfect for anything. I am crazy to belong."

"Very well. Then your name will be put down and you will get a notice of the next meeting. It will come to you in a strange way, but you will know it when it does come. You can't mistake it. How about you, Sydney? You will join, won't you?"

To Anne's surprise Sydney hesitated. The color came and went in her face as it did when she was speaking or about to speak.

"I should love to," she said at last, her face now crimson, "but—but I don't know whether I can afford to."

"Afford to!" echoed Bertha. "Why, the idea!"

"Well, I suppose we have to pay something for the feasts and things," said Sydney, in a low voice but very bravely. "And really, I—I—am afraid I couldn't."

Dorothy was about to speak, but Anne interposed. "That is all right," she said, "you need not bother about that. I will tell you later how that is managed."

She pinched Dorothy's arm as she spoke until Dolly almost cried out in pain, but knowing that Anne was pinching her for the very purpose of ensuring silence she bore it with the endurance of a stoic. "Then we will consider you both members," continued Anne, speaking very fast, "and you will come to the meeting and—see what you will see. It is getting late—yes, there goes the bell for study hour. We have just gotten through in time."

And the four girls hastened from the rapidly darkening schoolroom and took their way to the library, a large room across the hall where lamps were lighted and everything made ready for a quiet

hour with their books. After that there was an intermission of fifteen minutes to allow the pupils to prepare for supper, and then at six o'clock the big bell clanged and they assembled in the dining-room for their evening meal.

There were two long tables in the dining-room. At the ends sat the Misses Wickersham and Miss Lovering, and half way down the side of each table another teacher was stationed. In this way a general supervision was established and a conversation maintained that was eminently proper and improving in its tone. Miss Wickersham poured the cocoa at one table, Miss Abby at the other, while to Miss Jennie and Miss Lovering was relegated the task of helping the cold ham. The food was good but it was simple, and to hungry schoolgirls it sometimes seemed scanty. Very often a box from home would arrive for one of them and it was always shared among one's particular friends. There were a number of "sets" in the school, as was natural among so many scholars, but on the whole the spirit of good fellowship existed among them all and there was a very strong *esprit de corps* (there seems to be no English phrase which exactly expresses this) that was never wholly outlived by the graduates of the Wickersham School.

This evening Miss Wickersham as usual had a topic ready for conversation. This had been her

habit from time immemorial. Sometimes it was an event in history, sometimes one of the day. Anne Talbot declared that she had a list headed "Topics for the Evening Meal," which she had been compiling for years, and which was used alphabetically. That may or may not have been true, but on the night of which we are speaking the subject was Queen Anne and her times, which certainly was near the top of the A B C's.

Miss Wickersham was a tall thin lady whose hair had grown gray in the service of teaching. She was an extremely angular person, and she dressed with the utmost precision and a due regard for the fashions of the day. A black silk dress, with a bit of white tulle about the neck, formed her daily afternoon toilet. Her hair was arranged in puffs, with the front parted and crimped, and she wore eye-glasses. She had a cold manner and a voice that sounded like sleet on the window, according to Anne Talbot. She opened the conversation by asking what had made the reign of Queen Anne a celebrated epoch.

"The name of Anne, and the cottages she built," replied Anne Talbot promptly.

"Explain yourself more fully, Miss Talbot," said Miss Wickersham frostily. She knew that something dangerous might be coming. She always mistrusted Anne.

Anne dimpled and smiled. Her dark eyes glanced rapidly from one end of the long table to the other.

"Why, the name goes without saying! Of course all of us Annes are something queer and startling. And you know about the cottages, Miss Wickersham, don't you? She must have been very much interested in architecture. I always think of Queen Anne as sitting and planning Queen Anne cottages. How else did they get the name? Can't you fancy the dear old queen, her crown on her head, her sceptre leaning against her chair, a row of architects ——"

"That will do, Miss Talbot. Can any one else at the table tell me for what Queen Anne's reign was noted?"

There was a pause. Then Sydney Stuart, her flushed cheeks showing her timidity at speaking in public, turned towards the principal. "It was celebrated for her turning away from the real heir and bringing over the Hanoverians and making George the First king. It ought to have been her young brother, a Stuart."

"A Jacobite among us!" exclaimed the irrepressible Anne. "You have a family feeling for them, haven't you, Sydney? I was sure you were descended from Mary, Queen of Scots. If things had gone as they should have perhaps you would

now be seated on the throne with your crown on, Queen Sydney ! ”

“ Miss Talbot, your good spirits carry you too far,” observed Miss Wickersham reprovingly. “ Miss Stuart, your reply shows thought, but it was not the answer I am looking for. Can no one help us out ? ”

“ The reign of Queen Anne was celebrated,” said Bertha Macy, “ for the poets and writers and great literary men who lived then.”

Miss Wickersham bent upon her the most amiable gaze of which she was capable. “ You are right, Miss Macy. That is the answer.” And she continued to enlarge upon the subject.

“ Go up head ! ” whispered Anne, not daring to say anything more aloud. In another minute Bertha jumped and gave a little cry. A piece of bread, fired with unerring aim, had hit her on the head and lodged there. No teacher knew whence it came, for Miss Wickersham was speaking to the maid and the others were occupied. What the pupils knew was another matter. Anne herself was calmly cutting her ham when they looked at her.

CHAPTER IV

THAT same evening when at half past eight the girls had gone to their rooms as usual at that hour, there was a faint tapping upon one of the windows of the corner room occupied by Sydney and Bertha. It was still raining and the wind had risen into gusts. The sound was no doubt caused by a branch of one of the trees that grew so near the house on that side. But presently it came again, one—two—three—in slow regular taps. Sydney glanced at Bertha. She was removing her bangles as she stood in front of the dressing-table, and apparently was unconscious of the mysterious noise. In a moment it came again, and this time it was quite loud. Rat—tat—tat—directly on the window pane.

Bertha turned quickly. "What was that?" she exclaimed.

"I don't know," said Sydney. "It has been going on ever since we came up. I thought it was the wind at first, or a branch or something, but it can't be that. There it is again!"

This time the window pane was struck six times.

"Oh!" Bertha gave a little shriek. "It must be ghosts! This room is haunted!" And she started towards the door.

"Oh, how absurd!" laughed Sydney. "How can you believe such nonsense! I am going to open the window and see what it is."

"But it might be some one trying to get in!" exclaimed Bertha in an agitated whisper. "If you do I shall lock myself in the closet."

"All right, you can. But how could any one climb up to this window to get in? The next time it raps I am going to open the window."

Bertha retired to the closet. There was no way of locking herself into it, but there was a feeling of safety for her by merely being on that side of its door. She peered out through the crack, divided in her mind between timidity and curiosity, and watched Sydney's proceedings.

Sydney stood by the window, and the next time the sound came, which it did after an interval of a very few minutes, she raised the shade and flung up the sash. Just beyond the window sill a small white object danced and bobbed up and down. It looked at first like a little package. Then it seemed to her to be a box. She put out her hand and touched it. Yes, it was a small box stuck on the end of a fishing pole, which evidently was being held by some one in the room directly under-

neath. As she took hold of it a voice called from below in sing-song tones :

"Take me, read me, tell it not. The Kay Cue See is near—this—spot."

She obeyed the command, removed the box from the fishing pole, which was hastily withdrawn, and closing the window she turned towards her roommate who crept from the closet.

"It is the Kay Cue See!" she cried, laughing. "Oh, Bertha! The idea of your thinking of ghosts! See, there is something in this little box about it, I suppose."

"Don't tell, will you, Sydney, that I was so frightened?" urged Bertha. "I really couldn't help it. Promise, won't you?"

"Why, of course!" replied Sydney, more intent on examining the contents of the box than anything else. She had untied the string and now found inside the cover a wad of paper folded very small. Upon being opened, it proved to be a sheet of foolscap paper. At the top was a little pen and ink drawing cleverly done, of a door with a large "Number 4" on it. The door was partly open and the back of a girl's figure was seen entering, while other girls crowded after her. Beneath the picture were neatly printed the following lines :

"You are summoned to the Kay Cue See.
Its members you will surely wish to be,

So to-morrow at the magic hour of three
Oh, come to the jolly jamboree !
Walk, walk, walk, the upper corridor
Tap, tap, tap, at Room Number Four,
Fourth from the end, and 4 on the door,
There you will find us, members by the score,
Of the Kay Cue See.

“ The Kay Cue See !
Oh, what can it be ?
At the end of the year
You will see what you'll see
Then you'll know !
Ho ! ho ! ho !
What it is to be a member
Of the Kay Cue See.”

“ What fun ! ” said Bertha, taking possession of the paper when they had read it a second time. “ You don't want this, do you ? Anyhow, it is meant for me as much as for you, and I am making a collection of all kinds of souvenirs and interesting things like this. I do wonder what they do at the meetings and what we have to do to stay members. It certainly is mysterious.”

Sydney did not reply. She was as much interested in the club as Bertha was, but she was still uncertain as to whether she should belong. There were reasons why she should not, she told herself.

But at three o'clock the following afternoon she was one of the girls who walked along the upper

corridor and knocked upon a door from the knob of which hung a large sign of "Number 4."

It was Anne Talbot's and Dorothy Fearing's room and it presented at first glance a startling glare of color. One half of the room was hung with red. There were crimson curtains at the window on that side, a crimson table-cover, flags of the same brilliant hue, and each adorned with a very large H, decorated the walls, pictures were hung by red ribbons, everything that could be touched by color was in crimson. The other half of the room was equally gaudy, but the tint was blue. Blue window curtains, blue flags, blue ribbons. Of course every girl who reads this story will at once guess the significance of these decorations. Anne Talbot was for Harvard because her brother was there, Dolly Fearing for Yale for an equally good reason. The two were intimate friends and devoted to each other, but this was the subject upon which they could never agree, and they carried out their loyalty to their brothers to the utmost extreme.

Anne Talbot, being president of the Kay Cue See for the year, occupied the chair. This was an old high-backed wooden rocking-chair, and to make the position of president more imposing, the chair was placed upon the bed. Ruth Carter, one of the older girls, who was secretary, sat at a table

on the president's right, but fortunately in security on the floor. The other girls sat wherever they could find a resting place, some in chairs, some on the window sills, some on the floor or on the trunks. Sydney found herself perched upon the washstand, from which the pitcher and basin had been removed to the safety and seclusion of the closet.

There was a great buzz and chatter until Anne's little French traveling clock on the bureau struck the hour of three. Then the president rapped with a hair brush on the wooden arm of the rocking-chair and called for order. Immediately there was silence. The "old girls" knew what was expected of them, the new members were only too anxious to hear what was coming. The president cleared her throat with impressive loudness and opened the meeting. There was not so much known in those days about parliamentary rules for the conducting of public meetings and the proper carrying on of clubs, but Anne was equal to almost any occasion and nobody thought of suggesting that anything she might say or do was "out of order," nor of criticising her in any way.

"Here we are again," she said, "and I for one am mighty glad we *are* here. There is nothing nicer than the Kay Cue See, and before we go any further I should like to have you all unite in a

cheer. Three cheers for the Kay Cue See. Hip—hip—hurray! Hurray! Hurray!”

The cheers were given with a shrill will that would have made the rafters ring, had there been any rafters. Then the back of the brush was again applied to the arm of the chair and the president proceeded.

“It is nice to see so many of the old members, and I am sure you will all join in welcoming the new. Three cheers for the new members. Hip—hip—hurray!”

Again there was an uproar of sound. Again the brush was called into service, and quiet reigned once more.

“Of course,” continued the president, “these new girls are simply aching to know what is expected of them. We all know that they will find out soon enough. We were in their shoes last year. We at this time were tearing our hair to know what big things we had to do to stay in the dear old club. We were just as ignorant as they. It is a very queer club, unique I should say. I hope you new members will like it and all stay in and next year will be on hand to welcome the new girls just as we are doing now. Well, I have said all I can think of and so I will ask the secretary to call the roll and read the rules and report.”

Ruth Carter, who was a girl of seventeen, rose and

opened a blank book. From this she read first the names of the old members, each one of whom responded with the word "Present." Then the names of the five new girls, who answered likewise. Then came the constitution and by-laws, which were as follows:

"The Kay Cue See of the Wickersham School was founded in 1878. Consequently it is regarded as a very venerable institution and one which every one should be proud to join. All pupils at the school are eligible for membership, until something proves that they are not. The first year is one of mystery and mistakes. After that everything is explained and membership is a simple matter.

"Rule I. To K. Q.

"Rule II. To obey summons to meetings.

"Rule III. To pay fifty cents at the beginning of each year towards defraying necessary expenses of feasts.

"Rule IV. On receipt of a box of eatables from home to share it as much as possible with other members.

"Rule V. In every way to be loyal to the club. If for any reason a member resigns from the club she is expected to remain loyal, which means that she will tell its affairs to no one and will guard its secrets to the end of her life.

"Rule VI. K. Q. and again K. Q."

Ruth Carter read these rules aloud in a clear voice of authority. Then she continued: "The book is ready for signatures, and I will ask each member as her name is called to step forward and sign the book, which signature holds good for the whole year. The old members will come first."

The signing occupied some time and thus Sydney had the opportunity to consider the question of joining. Fifty cents was not a very large amount to pay yearly and she was quite sure that her mother would not wish her to decline on that account. The matter of expense was really the only reason she had for refusing, and there were many reasons why it seemed desirable to join, so when her turn came she also went forward and signed the book. The secretary was the last to put her name, which she did with a flourish.

"There!" she exclaimed. "That is done. Business is now over and other more important affairs will be attended to. Has anybody anything to suggest?"

"I have," said Molly Meigs, who was also one of the older girls. "I wish to present Three Opportunities. Will the secretary please make a note of these Three Opportunities? A very poor family by the Duck Pond. A down-trodden mongrel dog

living on Main Street near the Post Office. The Little Lady next door."

She paused, and immediately a hubbub of many voices broke out.

"I speak for the down-trodden dog!"

"The poor family by the Duck Pond! I have a splendid idea for them!"

"Why, Molly, what do you mean by the lady next door? There is no lady next door. The house is empty."

The president rapped her brush. "Will Miss Meigs kindly explain," said she as soon as she could make herself heard, "what she means by her extraordinary statement? We have always been given to understand that the house next door was empty, save for the ghosts and figures of our imagination."

"Hear! hear!" cried her audience admiringly.

"If some one is really living there, alive and like other people, the Kay Cue See ought to know about it, of course, but is it something for the Kay Cue See to take any active steps about?"

"It is," replied Molly Meigs, when the clapping which followed Anne's remarks had subsided somewhat. "I can say no more. I can only state, on my honor as a member of the Kay Cue See, that a lady is living next door."

Here to the surprise of everybody Sydney Stuart

spoke. "There is a lady there," she said eagerly, and then stopped, abashed at hearing her own voice in such a large meeting.

"Really and truly?" exclaimed Anne. "Have you seen her? How did you see her?"

"You know our room is on that side and I can see into the garden, or at least into a little part of it. It is so overgrown you can't see much. The lady was walking there, leaning on some one's arm. Her maid, I think."

"Why has the Kay Cue See any business to know more?" asked Ruth Carter, the secretary. "Of course I have no doubt that Molly Meigs knows what she is talking about, but at the same time I would suggest that such people as would live in the house next door are not very likely to be suitable objects for the work of the Kay Cue See."

"They are," insisted Molly. "They certainly are. You don't know a thing about it, Ruth, though you may think you do. You always——"

She was interrupted by an outburst of song. "K! Q! C! What ever you do, K! Q!" chanted all the old members. Molly laughed good-naturedly and said no more.

"Well, whatever we may think about the lady next door there can be no doubt about the down-trodden family and the poor dog," said Anne.

"Oh, no, I have gotten them mixed. It was a down-trodden dog, wasn't it? Kindly let us hear from some of you at the next meeting on those subjects." Then she sang, "Who will scale the wall?"

This was most mysterious to the new members. It all seemed mysterious, but this was the most so, and the response, delivered by all the old members in a sing-song voice made it still more remarkable.

"I answer to the call. 'Tis I will scale the wall."

"And who will climb the tree?"

"I and my sisters three. 'Tis we will climb the tree."

"And who will walk the rope?"

"'Tis difficult to cope, but I will walk the rope."

"And who will only wait?"

"I, if it be my fate. 'Tis I—will—only—wait."

These responses were sung in unison, in a slow chant. The new members looked at one another in astonishment. What could it all mean? Truly the Kay Cue See was a very unique organization.

"The meeting is adjourned," said the president. "Notices of the next will be served at the proper time and place. We've got to hustle now, for it is five minutes of four and the professor is coming at four for the lecture on Greek sculpture."

There was a rush for the door, and in a very few moments the first meeting of the Kay Cue See for the season was a thing of the past.

Sydney Stuart found it difficult at first to put her mind on Greek sculpture, but finally she succeeded in banishing all thought of the club for the present. After the lecture came the study hour, and it was not until the short period before supper, when she and Bertha were in their room, that she could think or speak of the strange proceedings that had taken place in room No. 4.

Bertha was apparently much excited by the events of the afternoon. "Isn't it the oddest club you ever heard of?" she exclaimed, her interest in it making her speak in a more friendly manner than she usually showed Sydney. It was evident to the most casual observer that these two girls did not like each other. And it was not all the fault of Bertha. Sydney had taken very little pains to conceal the fact that she did not find her roommate congenial. She made no effort to overcome her dislike but on the contrary rather encouraged it. She felt that she was above Bertha, whose lack of refinement showed itself in many ways, and it never occurred to her that it would be better to look for the good that was in the girl rather than think so much of the bad that was there. "What does it all mean?" said Bertha. "Why did they all

begin to shout 'Kay Cue' to Molly Meigs? What had she said that made them do it? She was only talking about who was in the house next door."

"No, it was more than that," said Sydney. "She began to say something to Ruth Carter and they interrupted her that way. 'Kay, Cue, Kay, Cue, whatever you do, Kay Cue.' It certainly is queer. And then that song about 'who will scale the wall?' Do you suppose it will be a whole year before we know more?"

"No," said Bertha; "of course it won't! I shall find out before I have been here many weeks. I can just tell you that. The poor family and the dog didn't sound very interesting, nor the lady next door, but I shan't miss a thing, for you don't know how things will turn out. Oh, Sydney, would you mind lending me a handkerchief? I can't find mine anywhere, but I know I have lots of clean ones."

Sydney reluctantly opened her trunk and took the upper one of a neat pile.

"Goody! How carefully you keep your things," said Bertha, as she took it. "I never could. It isn't in me. You don't have your handkerchiefs embroidered, do you? Mine have three initials all done by hand. Done in ink makes them rather common, don't you think so? But then I suppose

ink is good enough for this quality of handkerchief. There is the supper bell and I haven't washed my hands! Do pour out some water for me, won't you? I'll tell you a good joke, only you must never tell. I happen to know that Miss Wickersham is going to talk about Arctic Explorers to-night and I have read them up in the Encyclopædia."

"Why, how do you know?" asked Sydney.

"Oh, that's telling! There, I'm ready at last."

CHAPTER V

IT does not take long to become accustomed to a new mode of life, and before many weeks had elapsed Sydney Stuart felt as though she had been at boarding school with Bertha Macy as a roommate for as many months. School routine makes time fly quickly. Every day the girls rose at the same hour, went down to breakfast at half-past seven o'clock, walked out for a breath of fresh air (the Misses Wickersham appreciated the importance of fresh air) from quarter past eight to a quarter of nine, and were at their desks at nine, when school was opened with prayers and Bible reading. From twelve to half-past twelve there was an intermission, and at two o'clock the dinner hour. After dinner until four the girls could do very much as they pleased, within reasonable limits. At that hour there was usually a lecture by some visiting professor, or a reading or a concert in the parlor, until five, the study hour, and then supper and some mild form of entertainment until bedtime.

Sydney was what might be considered a studious girl. She really enjoyed her books and was anxious to learn, not only from a sense of duty but

from the love of knowledge. She astonished her teacher as well as her classmates by reciting the many pages of Grecian history which had been appointed as their lesson almost "word for word." She studied everything in this thorough way except mathematics. Here she faltered. It was undoubtedly her weak spot. Anne Talbot, Dolly Fearing and Gertrude King who were her classmates in all else, were studying algebra, while Bertha Macy was with much older girls in geometry, and Sydney was still wrestling with the Rule of Three! It was very humiliating.

"I don't know why I can't get it straight," she said one day to Anne. "I seem to be the only girl in school who is so stupid except Elsie Brent. Miss Abby gets perfectly wild with me, and the more she explains the duller I get, until I can't tell what the difference is between fractions and denominators and quarters and sixteenths."

"Would you call three-sixteenths a fraction or a denominator?" asked Anne, her dimples beginning to show.

"I don't know I'm sure. I know you are laughing at me. I am not so stupid as not to be sure of that."

"You're not a bit stupid, Syd. You're brighter than any of us in some ways. Most ways, I think. I have always heard that some people can't get

numbers into their heads, but that doesn't mean they can't do other things. You can write like a streak. Your compositions are the best in the class. And look at the way you write poetry! You will be elected Club Poet before you know it. There, I have made a rhyme myself. That is a sure sign I shall see my beau before night. Unfortunately I haven't got any to see."

It was now Sydney's turn to laugh.

"I don't know why you are laughing," said Anne. "I say what I mean."

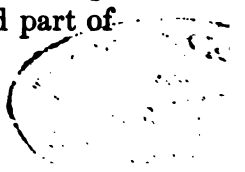
"But you don't always mean what you say," retorted Sydney. "There is a difference."

The two girls were walking together. It was the early morning promenade, and as usual at this hour they filed along in procession. Partners were engaged days ahead for this, and the girls kept memorandum books for the purpose of noting names and dates. Naturally some of them were greater favorites than others. It was often necessary to wait a week or ten days to secure the privilege of a walk with Anne Talbot, and Ruth Carter was equally popular with her class. Sydney as yet had very few engagements, and therefore it had been a great pleasure to her when Anne a day or two before had asked her to walk with her on this especial morning. She did not know that Anne had suspected that she was a bit

lonely, and had arranged with Dolly that they should give up the walk they had planned in order that Anne might have a free morning for Sydney. Anne Talbot was always doing nice things for the girls she liked. It was not so easy for her to do them for those whom she did not care for.

It was a beautiful morning in November. The air was soft and balmy, and the purple haze that blended the blue of the sky, the dull greens of pines and cedars, the yellow of the oaks and the rich browns of old Mother Earth, proved that Indian summer was making its yearly fleeting visit. There was a pervading fragrance of smoke from the fires which careful gardeners had lighted to burn brushwood and dead leaves before the snow should come. The atmosphere was so still that sounds from very far away could be distinctly heard. The Minnepachague, floating lazily from the mountains to the distant sea, lay like a blue ribbon between the meadows which guarded its banks. Some crows cawed lustily from the pine trees, and a chickadee sang on a bush near by.

The girls were walking back from the "village," as the town was still called by the old residents, and their way was along a country road which formed a short cut from the post-office to the Wickersham School. The longer route was through more dignified streets and the more thickly settled part of



the town. They had been to the post-office for the morning mail, which was now in a bag and carried by Miss Jennie Wickersham, not to be distributed until the noon recess. The girls cast longing glances at the big bundle of letters that went into the bag every morning, but Miss Wickersham was inexorable on this point as on many others. No letters to distract the mind at the beginning of the day. That matter had been settled many years ago.

"Did you know you were chosen?" asked Anne, presently.

"Chosen for what?" said Sydney.

"You will know when you know."

"I suppose that means the Kay Cue See. When any one says anything that doesn't seem to have much sense to it but really has a good deal, then I am sure it has something to do with the club. I hope it won't be something that I can't do properly and shall get turned out for, but I'll do my best. Anne, I wish I dared ask you something. I do need advice."

"What is it?" asked Anne, promptly. "I dote on giving advice. I knew you had something on your mind. That is the very reason I told D—I mean I was sure there was something in the wind. Hurry up, for we are nearly home."

"Well, it is this. Yesterday morning I had to

go up to my room in the middle of the morning to get a paper that my lecture notes were written on that I had forgotten to bring down to the school-room. Just as I got near our room the door opened and who should come out but ——”

She was interrupted by the girls in front who suddenly turned and spoke to them. “We have just heard the most exciting thing,” said Gertrude King. “They are passing it all along the line and you are to tell the girls behind you. It seems the boys at Pratt’s have a new trick on us. You know yesterday how muddy it was when we were out in the afternoon? Well, some of them were at Tinkham’s when Bertha Macy and Alice Dodd were there, and after they left the boys followed them and saw their footprints in the mud, and had a measuring rule and measured the size of their feet. Did you ever hear of such a thing? There is danger of their doing it all the time, and we have got to be awfully careful on muddy days. Pass it along the line.”

This important piece of information was “passed along” forthwith, and as a result there was no time for Sydney to finish her confidential conversation with Anne, for in a few minutes they had reached the school and freedom of speech was over for the time being.

“Tell me at recess,” whispered Anne, as they

parted. But with recess came other matters which were even more absorbing and important.

There were three letters in the mail bag that day which had much to do with the course of this story. Two were addressed to Sydney Stuart, the third was for Anne Talbot. One of Sydney's was from her sister Margaret and was as follows :

" MY DEAR SYDNEY :

" We were so glad to get your last letter and hear all about your new friends and your studies. It is a great comfort to us to know that after all boarding-school is not so dreadful as you feared. Certainly it is a fortunate thing about the Misses Wickersham's generosity. Not every one would remember to show their affection for father and grandfather and make it possible for you to be there on such reasonable terms. Anne Talbot must be charming and some of the other girls. There are some you don't care for of course, but that is to be expected. We can't hope to like everybody, but we can usually manage to get along comfortably, and even though you are thrown into such close contact with Miss M. perhaps you will not mind her little failings as time goes by. The worst of all is her curiosity. It would be wise to tear up all your letters from home as soon as possible.

You ask about Phil. He is doing pretty well in his new position, but he is still very morbid. I think that will wear off in time, but the cloud is still heavy still. It was unfortunate that it should have happened with Phil, for he has a nature that is more than Bob's, for instance. However, we must hope for the best, and help him to live it up. Fortunately no one knows of it in New York except his employer, Mr. Sherman. Mother told him and told him. He is a kind gentleman, if ever there was one, and he will never speak of it. He thanked mother for telling him. Mother is very kind to Phil, but of course Phil has not held a position yet. Just an office boy, but there is a chance for him to work up. I am very fond of him, and like my work very much. Dear little sister, we miss you still, and I wish you could come home every week. We are hoping to get you here for the Christmas holidays, but it is still uncertain. The journey is so expensive! Amabel sends a letter and says to tell you that the cat from the flat next to ours came in our window, and that she is going to boarding-school with you next year. She loves you dear. Love from us all.

“Your loving sister,

“MARGARET.”

Edney read this letter first. She fully in-

tended to follow Margaret's advice and destroy it at once, but she delayed long enough to read her other letter. This was evidently a communication from the Kay Cue See. It was in a conventional envelope, addressed in an unfamiliar hand and bearing a New York postmark, so there was nothing in its outward appearance to signify the nature of its contents. At the expense of much effort and trouble the managers of the club resorted to all sorts of devices to mystify the members. The outgoing mails to New York frequently carried large envelopes full of smaller missives, stamped and addressed to the girls at Kingsbridge, which the relatives at home were asked to post, that they might appear to come from a distance.

This which was intended for Sydney was in the form of an invitation.

"Mrs. Braithwaite would be happy to have the pleasure of Miss Sydney Stuart's company on Tuesday evening, November 18th, at seven o'clock. Miss Stuart will please enter the premises by way of the garden wall. 'Now who will scale the wall?' Syd answers to the call. 'Tis she will scale the wall.'"

Of course there could be no doubt as to the origin of this letter. Sydney felt a thrill of excitement. This was the first time she had been called upon to do anything of real importance by

order of the Club. At the last meeting there had been some further discussion of the mysterious stranger who had moved next door, and it was known that she was an elderly lady by the name of Braithwaite. She had not been seen, however; and the place seemed as deserted as ever, save for a woman who went every day to the town with a basket, and an old man who worked in the garden and about the place. Braithwaite Hall had always possessed a weird fascination for the girls at the Wickersham School and the coming of these persons to live there added to its charm for them. Sydney felt that it was a great honor to be chosen to investigate matters. It never occurred to her that there could be the slightest harm in obeying the mandate of the Club. She had been ordered to go and go she would, in spite of every obstacle that might arise.

Full of the importance of the mission she gathered up her letters. The two envelopes were precisely the same size and shape. She hastily placed Margaret's letter in the one that had contained the Club letter, and the Club letter into Margaret's envelope. It had taken some time to study the two, and there had been interruptions, so that recess was nearly over when she had finished reading them. She looked about for Anne but saw that she was absorbed in her own letters.

She thought she would go up to her room, therefore, and look over into the Braithwaite grounds. It would be well to survey the new country which she was to penetrate so long after dark that evening.

On her way up-stairs she passed a large stove which stood in the hall. It occurred to her that here was an opportunity to destroy Margaret's letter at once. Though she had a box with a lock where she kept her letters and the key of which she carried always with her, she was a little uncertain of its safety. Strange things had happened lately, she was sure. So she stopped in front of the stove and threw into its fiery bed of coals the envelope addressed in Margaret's hand. She watched it burn with some regret. She liked to preserve her letters for frequent reading, especially those which brought her so much news from home, but Margaret had told her to destroy this at once, so she must do so. Then with the other letter in her hand, that which she supposed to be the note from the Kay Cue See, she went up to her room.

On the stairs she met Bertha Macy and Julia Clark. Julia was also one of the new girls, and was already quite intimate with Bertha. Her home was in Wilmington, Delaware, and she was almost the only pupil who lived farther from Kingsbridge than New York.

Bertha and Julia both glanced at the letter which Sydney carried rather conspicuously. She felt some pride at having been given so important a commission by the Kay Cue See and she was not averse to having these two girls know that she had been chosen. It was quite against the rules to tell what you were to do. If three or four had been selected none knew of the others until the hour appointed arrived. In this case she was quite uncertain as to whether she should alone "scale the wall" or whether she should have companions. She had no intention therefore of announcing the plot for the evening, but—she did not hide her letter!

Bertha and Julia, both keenly alive to all such matters, and having scented in some way the fact that a mystery was on foot (those things are apt to be in the air, especially in a boarding-school), turned to each other as soon as she had passed upstairs.

"There! She got one!" said Bertha.

"Of course she did. That makes the third we have seen to-day. Gertrude King, Ruth Carter and now Sydney Stuart. Wouldn't you give anything to know what she is to do? How can we find out? I think it is mean that they haven't chosen us for anything yet, except that stupid trip to buy things at the store."

They walked up and down the garden together until recess came to an end, wondering what summons could have been sent to Sydney.

"For I know from the very way she held the letter that it was a Kay Cue See," said Julia.

Instead of dismissing the subject from their minds as being no concern of theirs, they exerted all their ingenuity to guess what it could be. The matter rapidly assumed important proportions in their opinion. They felt that they must find out by hook or by crook what Sydney had been ordered to do.

In the meantime Sydney had gone to her room. She laid the precious document on her table, intending to lock it in her box before she went down to the schoolroom. Then she turned to the window, close to which the table stood, and gazed down into the grounds next door. The old gardener was raking the dead leaves. As she looked she saw a little glimpse of red, which moved quickly among the bushes. Presently it came into sight and she saw distinctly a little figure in a bright scarlet cloak and hood, leaning upon the arm of the maid. It was the lady herself. How exciting it would be to go and see her at close range!

It was indeed strange that not a thought of the impropriety of such an excursion occurred to her



"SHE GAZED DOWN INTO THE GROUNDS NEXT DOOR"

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

even now. Sydney was very anxious to be liked by her schoolmates. It seemed as though this would be an excellent way to obtain popularity. If only she might be successful in her expedition! She forgot everything else while she thought of this, and was startled by the sound of the school bell which was rung at the end of recess. She ran from the room, leaving her letter lying upon her table. It was not until lessons were over that she remembered it, and even then she did not know precisely where she had put it. When she went up to prepare for dinner she had just time enough to wash her hands and smooth her hair. Bertha was already there. Sydney did not see her letter anywhere so she supposed she had put it in her drawer. In her haste she did not think much about it. It was not until three o'clock that she really considered the matter. Then she went to her room again and found it lying on her table where she had placed it in the morning.

"It is funny I did not see it before," she said to herself, as she locked it up in her box, "but I was in such a rush."

CHAPTER VI

ANNE TALBOT had also received several letters that morning, and there was one among them which caused her to feel extremely angry while at the same time it filled her with curiosity. It was an anonymous letter, which perhaps is of all things the most cowardly and unpardonable. If Anne had had a little more experience of the world she would have known that a person who has not the courage to sign his or her name to a letter is a very worthless individual and not of sufficient importance to be listened to, but as she had never in her life before received such a communication and had never heard the subject discussed, it was not to be expected that she should know that such things should be left unnoticed. It was written in a style that looked something like printing, on a sheet of ruled paper, and its contents were as follows :

“There is a member of the Kay Cue See who ought to be watched carefully. We do not think she is a proper person to belong. Watch !”

This note had neither the customary beginning nor any signature. Anne examined the postmark and found that it had come from New York. Of

course it had been sent to her because she was the president, and she decided that it was her duty to show it to Ruth Carter, the secretary, and if she thought best they would give it to the other members of the secret committee to read. No one but the girls who were of this committee knew who belonged to it. The chief object of the Kay Cue See appeared to be to make everything as mysterious as possible.

Ruth Carter, however, advised that nothing should be said about it at present.

"Just keep the letter, and wait and see what else happens," she said. "Anonymous letters are perfectly hateful, and it ought to be burned right up, but perhaps it would be wiser to wait a little while before you do that. The committee might object if we told them afterwards that you had received the letter and hadn't shown it to them."

"Who can have written it?" said Anne, reading it for at least the tenth time. "And whom do you suppose they mean?"

"I can't imagine who wrote it, but I shouldn't wonder if they meant Bertha Macy. Somehow I haven't liked that girl from the first. There is something about her I don't trust. Very likely some of the girls have felt the same way and may have really seen something which makes them believe she ought to be dropped. If they had only

left it to be done in the proper way it would have been better."

"Perhaps a new girl has written it, and she doesn't know what the regular way is. Sometimes I have awful doubts about the Club, Ruth—but not often. Most of the time I think it just too perfect and am perfectly thankful the girls who founded it had such a brilliant inspiration. The only new girl who could have written it about Bertha Macy is Sydney Stuart. She doesn't like her very much, but the other new ones are quite intimate with her. But it doesn't seem like Sydney to write this."

"I shouldn't think so either, but you never can tell. We shall just have to wait and see what else happens. There will be another before long. You'll see!"

The afternoon seemed unusually long to Sydney. The time fairly dragged. The weather was beautiful and the girls were out of doors every moment that it was possible. Miss Wickersham had consented to have a tennis court on the level space at the side of the house, the side farthest from Braithwaite Hall, but as only four could play, and as Sydney had no racket, she was seldom included in that. There were not as many sports for girls in those days as there are now. Hockey had not been thought of for them, and as most of the

Wickersham girls were from the city they had never attempted baseball or cricket. So it was usual to walk about and talk, and therefore not have nearly as wholesome or as good a time as girls do nowadays. This afternoon Sydney's special friends were playing tennis, and as she was too shy to ask any one else to go with her, she went off for a solitary walk. This in itself was pleasant enough, for she enjoyed merely being out in the soft Indian summer air, but something occurred as she was returning that disturbed her, although she told herself that she was foolish to mind or even to notice such a trifle.

She was coming from the woods which stretched up over the hill behind the schoolhouse. The path was quite narrow with a thick growth of trees on one side and the high stone wall which surrounded the Braithwaite place on the other. Just in the narrowest part she met Bertha Macy and Julia Clark. They were walking arm in arm and were deep in a conversation which appeared to be of a most interesting nature. When they saw Sydney they stopped talking and drew to one side to let her pass. They held their skirts tightly about them precisely as though they did not wish her to touch them. Sydney made some laughing remark but neither of them took the slightest notice of her. Except for the fact that they had

drawn aside for her to pass, it was as though they did not see her. Sydney's face grew scarlet. She hurried on without a word. She went immediately to her room to lay aside her hat and coat. She decided to take a book and read until the study hour. But she sat with the book unopened in her hand and before she realized what she was doing she was crying.

"It is perfectly silly of me to mind," she said to herself. "I *won't* mind. But Bertha is getting more and more disagreeable. I don't know what to do about it. It is so hard to have to room with a girl who dislikes you. I know I don't like her either, and perhaps that is the reason. I suppose Margaret would say it was. Dear old Margaret! I wish I could see her, and talk it over with her, and get to thinking right! I do hope I can go home for the Christmas holidays! It would be dreadful to stay here and have everybody go, and Bertha would look down on me so. She looks down on me now. That is what it is. She thinks I am a nobody. Well, I am poor, but that isn't such a dreadful thing as being ill-bred. She is that. There, I am not going to think any more about her. I don't care if she is afraid of touching me when we meet."

She dried her eyes and smoothed her hair, looking in the glass with a closer scrutiny than usual

in order that all traces of her recent tears might be hidden, and when Bertha Macy came up-stairs shortly before the study hour she found her roommate sitting by the window quietly reading.

Bertha bustled about, making a great amount of noise but saying nothing. She opened and shut all her bureau drawers, one after the other. She banged her trunk lid, upset a chair, and finally in her zeal she broke a tumbler. At the crash of glass Sydney looked up.

"Oh, that is too bad!" she exclaimed, and leaving her seat she began to help Bertha to gather up the pieces of glass. "How did you happen to do it?" She spoke very pleasantly.

"You need not trouble yourself," said Bertha coldly. "I can find the glass perfectly well alone."

"Oh, all right," said Sydney, and presently she left the room.

In the hall below she met Anne Talbot.

"Anne," she said, in a rather choked voice, "I don't know what I am going to do."

"What about? Do you mean to-night? Oh, it will be easy enough, Sydney. *Don't, don't* show the white feather! If you knew how much depended ——"

"Oh, not about to-night! I am glad to do that. No, it is something very different. It is about Bertha Macy."

Anne looked troubled.

"Please don't say anything about her now, Sydney. I—I would rather you didn't."

Sydney drew back. She felt deeply hurt. She had counted on Anne's friendship and support and evidently Anne did not wish to give it to her.

"Oh, all right," she said to her, just as she had said it to Bertha a few minutes before, and then she left her and continued on her way down-stairs.

"There, I have hurt Sydney's feelings awfully," exclaimed Anne to Dolly Fearing, whom she found in their room. "She was just going to say something about Bertha and I shut her up. I couldn't let her, especially as I am quite sure she is the one who wrote the anonymous letter." She had told Dolly about the letter, for she always told her everything.

"I don't know why you are so sure Sydney wrote that letter," said Dolly. "You always feel so certain about things, Anne, but you do sometimes come out wrong."

"Well, I ought to have answered Sydney differently, I know that, but I was in a tearing hurry, and I thought at first that she was going to be a coward about the Kay Cue See and then I thought she was going to break another rule, and I just had to stop her, and of course she doesn't understand.

I will say something nice to her the first chance I get."

And so a little later, Anne, smiling and gracious, slipped a little package into Sydney's hand. "Marshmallows," she whispered. "Put them in your pocket and eat them to-night when you go over the wall! And will you walk with me a week from Friday, Syd? Put it down, so as not to forget it."

As if Sydney could possibly forget it! The very thought of it made her quite happy again. It required so little to make her happy or miserable.

At last the day was over, supper had been eaten and the thrilling moment had come for the expedition to Braithwaite Hall. Some of the girls were gathered in the library, where games were played every evening, backgammon, chess, halma, or writing games. Miss Wickersham had retired to her room, and Miss Jennie was in charge. Miss Abby and one or two of the other teachers had gone to an entertainment that was being given in the Town Hall, and some of the girls were with them. It was not strange, therefore, that Sydney's absence from the games was unnoticed, as well as that of two other girls, Anne Talbot and Marion Shaw. Miss Jennie, if she thought of them at all, would naturally suppose that they were of the

party who had gone into Kingsbridge. The night had been carefully chosen by the committee for this very reason.

Very quietly a slender figure stole down the stairs and out by the back door. It was Sydney. She wore a gray ulster with a hood which was drawn over her head. She closed the door without a sound and found herself alone in the dark garden. It was dark now, but a little later the moon would be up. She crept along the path by the wall. Down near the corner there was a place where the stones were quite uneven, which she had noticed when she passed there in the afternoon. It seemed the best place to climb over for they would afford a surer foothold. She did not see two figures who followed her down the path, drawing more deeply into the shadow when she paused to look about and find the spot which she had selected.

She clambered up with some difficulty but presently she had gained the top. Pausing here a moment for breath she found that just at this part of the Braithwaite garden there was an open space where it would be safe to jump down, which she accordingly did. The question of getting back did not occur to her. Her one object was to reach her destination. As she made her way towards the house the two figures who had followed her ap-

peared upon the top of the wall. Here they seated themselves and waited.

Braithwaite Hall looked dark and forbidding. There was one light at the back of the house, shining from a room that probably was the kitchen. There was another shining through the drawn curtains of some windows on the second story. With these exceptions the house had the appearance of being quite deserted. But as she drew nearer a sound broke upon the stillness. Some one was playing on a piano.

Sydney went boldly to the front of the house. There was a small porch here, its roof supported by tall columns, and a short flight of steps led up to the front door. She felt for a door-bell but there was none. An old knocker hung upon the door but she had not the courage to rap with it. Instead she turned the knob and found to her surprise that the door was not fastened. She opened it and walked in.

By this time Sydney was quite absorbed in the excitement of her adventure. Her one thought was to carry out the commands of the Kay Cue See, without regard to anything else. She was actually entering some one else's house as slyly as a burglar would have done, but it never occurred to her that it was wrong. On the contrary she felt a thrill of elation. She had been chosen to

carry out a most perilous enterprise and she was determined to prove herself worthy. So, when she found herself in a wide and lofty hall, dimly lighted by a small lamp that stood upon a table, and heard the wonderful music that came from above, her conscience did not trouble her nor her courage waver. She walked along the hall and up the broad old-fashioned staircase, following the sound until she reached the closed door through which it undoubtedly came. Again without giving herself time to think that it was wrong, she turned the handle of the door and looked in.

The room was brightly lighted, but thick red curtains hung at all the windows and allowed but little of the light to escape into the night without. It was a wonderful room, and Sydney's breath came more quickly as she looked at it. Pictures hung upon the walls, and also great mirrors that extended from the floor to the ceiling. The furniture was of old mahogany, and there were cabinets and shelves filled with beautiful china. There was not a book to be seen. At one end of the long room, with her back to the door at which Sydney stood, sat a lady at the piano. She was playing with such marvelous skill that Sydney, who loved music, listened in wonder and delight. Suddenly, in the midst of the crashing of chords, the player paused. The sudden silence was in-

tense. She did not turn around but she bent her head slightly to one side.

"That is not Eliza," she said. "Who is it? Who is there?"

Without a word Sydney closed the door and ran down the stairs. At the bottom she paused and listened. Was the lady following her? No, it was quiet. But just then a bell sounded at the back of the house and she heard a step approaching from the kitchen. She ran to the front door and in another moment was out once more in the night. She hurried around the corner of the house and tried to find her way to that part of the garden by which she had entered. It was very dark and she was so agitated by her anxiety to escape that she lost her bearings and wandered about the overgrown garden paths, not knowing which way to turn, but finally she reached the wall and made her way as best she could through the bushes to the place where she had climbed over.

But climbing back was another matter. There were no convenient stepping-stones on the Braithwaite side, and after many unsuccessful efforts to get up she decided that, unless she could discover a possible crossing between there and the road, it would be necessary for her to go out of the front gate and walk boldly along the road and in at the

front of the Wickersham place. She hesitated to do this for she had been explicitly commanded to "scale the wall," but as that was clearly out of the question and as time was going fast, she must return as best she could or run the chance of being locked out for the night. Her absence would be discovered and what would happen then she dared not think. Certainly she must get back and as soon as possible.

It was growing lighter now. Above the tree tops a silvery glow lighted up the east. The moon was rising! She paused a moment to watch it. The glow deepened, and now a bright spot showed clearly, growing larger and larger until the great round moon was up and looking at her as she stood there watching. Then she bethought herself once more of the need for haste. It was easy now to find her way, but even by the moonlight she could discover no available means of climbing over the wall. She walked quickly to the road and very soon she turned in at the school gate. She had not seen a group of people who were walking from the direction of the town and who could see her very distinctly. They reached the Wickersham gate and entered it just as Sydney passed around to the back of the house. She went in by the same door by which she had gone out. The two figures who had followed her to the wall when

she went were waiting for her here. She saw them now for the first time.

"Is it you, Anne?" she exclaimed in a whisper.

"Yes, and Marion Shaw. We were chosen to watch you. You did splendidly, Syd, except not coming back the way you went."

"I couldn't! But I have had such an exciting time!"

"Don't stop to tell us now," said Marion Shaw, "though we are simply wild to hear about it. Get up to your room as quickly as possible. Be very careful."

They crept into the house and softly closed the door. As they walked through the corridor the front door at the other end opened and the party of teachers and pupils who had been to the entertainment at the Town Hall came in. Anne Talbot hastily opened the door of a convenient cloak closet under the stairs which had sheltered girls before this, and drawing Sydney by the hand and followed by Marion, she pulled the door to until merely a crack remained. It was impossible to close it entirely. Here they waited, scarcely daring to breathe. If Miss Abby should chance to come to the closet! But she did not. Instead, she and her companions passed directly into the library. Anne, peering through the crack, watched them, and then when the coast was clear

she and Marion and Sydney hurried up the stairs and gained their rooms in safety. It had been a narrow escape, and although Miss Abby had distinctly seen a figure enter the place which looked suspiciously like one of the pupils, she was unable to discover who had been walking alone at that unseemly hour.

CHAPTER VII

THE following day Anne Talbot received a second anonymous letter. It was written in the same print-like hand as the first, which was evidently a disguised hand. The paper and envelope were the same, but the postmark this time was Kingsbridge, and its contents were a little longer. This is what it said :

“There is a member of the Kay Cue See who ought not to belong. I have told you this before, but I did not tell you then that there is a mystery about her and a disgrace. I will not tell you now what that disgrace is, but I warn you that she must be put out or I will resign and tell the reason. She is not a person to have in a ladies’ club.”

This was certainly a very startling communication for the president of a Club to receive. Anne’s feelings were a mixture of indignation, contempt and curiosity. She was an impulsive girl, loving and loyal to a degree, but like every one else in this world she occasionally made a mistake. Her judgment was not always to be depended upon. In this case she had already decided that Sydney was the author of the first

anonymous note, and having allowed that decision to establish itself very firmly in her mind it was easy enough when the second letter came to believe that Sydney had written this one also. She was so sure of this that she almost succeeded in convincing Ruth and Dolly also.

"I know she wrote them," said she, when the three were walking arm in arm about the grounds at recess, discussing the matter so intently that they were noticed by more than one of the girls. "Sydney has had something on her mind for some time. She has tried to tell me several times and I have shut her right up. There was nothing for her to do but write these letters. She means Bertha Macy of course. Well, I am just going to speak my mind out plainly this afternoon at the meeting. She ought not to write such things."

"But, Anne, I think you are a little hard on Sydney," said Dolly Fearing. "You say yourself that she has wanted to speak to you about it and you wouldn't let her. What else could she do?"

"Dolly! The idea of your standing up for her! She oughtn't to do anything. There is no need for her to tell us about any disgrace. I suppose she means disgrace in Bertha's family, for of course there is nothing a girl could have done herself, and what difference does it make whether there is disgrace in a person's family? If the girl herself

behaves all right in school and in connection with the Club I am sure I don't care anything about her family or what they may have done, and I know you don't either. I am disappointed in Sydney. I really am."

"But, Anne, we don't know for certain that it is Sydney."

"Of course it is! Who else could have written about Bertha?"

"But we don't know that the person means Bertha."

"Why, of course it is Bertha! Who else could it be?"

This seemed unanswerable, and as Anne was a girl who spoke with much vehemence and decision her remarks were apt to be convincing. In spite of their calmer natures and less hasty utterances, Ruth and Dolly felt less sure than at first that Anne might be mistaken. It really seemed very possible, not to say probable, that Sydney had written the two notes.

There was to be a meeting of the Kay Cue See that very afternoon. As the warm weather still continued it was to be held in the arbor. The arbor was a rustic summer house at the entrance to the woods behind the schoolhouse. It was quite large, and of a circular shape. A seat extended around its entire circumference and on this

the members took their places at the appointed hour. There was a rough board table in the centre and a chair had been placed upon it for the president. It always seemed to add to the dignity of the office for the chair to be elevated as much as possible. Ruth Carter, with her roll book and papers, sat in another chair beside the table. The president's chair was placed with its back to the entrance of the arbor, but as the seat occupied by the members extended from one side of this entrance around the arbor to the other side, it was impossible for the president to face all of the girls. She could not see those behind her except by turning. As it happened, Bertha Macy sat by the doorway, and was therefore completely out of Anne's range of vision. Ruth could not see her face either, for the president's chair obstructed her view. Sydney, on the contrary, sat right in the middle of the row and directly in front of Anne.

The roll was called and the preliminary business transacted, and then the president, rapping for order with a piece of wood instead of the back of a brush, in deference to the out-of-door meeting, began her customary speech.

"Friends and members of the Kay Cue See," she said, "I have to report the successful undertaking of a very perilous adventure last night. One of our new members proved to be equal to

the occasion. She was watched and not found wanting. Neither was she found *out*. On the contrary, she was found *in*. When our dear friend and instructress, Miss A., who would always be glad to find us *out* if she could, poked her dear elongated nose into one room after the other last night, to see that all was as it should be, she found our respected new member *in* her bed. Will the member who performed the adventure kindly rise and tell us all about it?"

This to Sydney was quite unexpected. She had not supposed that she would be called upon to speak in public. She looked at Anne imploringly, but the president was inexorable.

"Rise, Miss Stuart, if you please, and give us an account of scaling the wall."

Sydney, her color coming and going with painful intensity stood up. She spoke very fast, the words tumbling over one another in her agitation.

"Oh, I climbed the wall down there by the corner, and went in the front door. I heard music and went up-stairs and looked in. The lady was playing and then I ran out again and came home. I couldn't climb the wall on that side, so I came back by the road."

"Did you discover anything about the lady?"

"No, except that she plays beautifully."

"There was something else to be discovered,"

said the president in her most oracular manner. "Can any one here present tell me what it was?"

No one appeared to know for no one spoke.

"Evidently you don't know. Well, I am not going to tell you, but I will tell you this. Whoever is chosen to go in there again is expected to find out what I mean. There is a reason why it is very proper that the Kay Cue See should get to know that lady and be of use to her. One great object of the Kay Cue See is to be useful. I think after all I *will* tell you. That little lady is blind. She can't see a thing. Miss Stuart, we are very much pleased at the way you accomplished such a difficult task and the Club congratulates you. Sit down now, Sydney, and don't blush your head off."

This unexpected ending to the president's very formal and impressive speech made every one laugh, and poor Sydney, her face of the deepest scarlet, was glad to take her seat. There was no way of hiding her face, however, and her blushes had already made her the butt of the school. Some mischievous girl had discovered that by speaking suddenly to Sydney Stuart you could turn her cheeks from palest pink to a fine Harvard crimson in an instant. She had imparted this interesting fact to the others, and it was a favorite pastime

with them all to address her unexpectedly, or even to say, "Are you for Yale or Harvard, Sydney?" and then scream with laughter at the looked-for result. Every one knows that schoolgirls are capable of many forms of persecution, and Sydney's extreme shyness made it impossible for her to defend herself. Anne had frequently come to her rescue, but Anne had been peculiar the last day or two. This shot of hers at the close of her speech reduced Sydney almost to tears, but she managed to keep them back. As a consequence, however, she was in a somewhat agitated condition of mind, which soon became intensified by what followed.

"I have got something to say which I don't like to say at all," said Anne. "It makes me very uncomfortable, but it has got to be done, so here goes. There is some one in this Club who is doing very queer things, and she might just as well stop doing them right off. I shan't say exactly what they are. The guilty person knows what she has done and it isn't necessary for any one else to know. I don't know for certain myself who it is, but I have consulted with others and we decided that the best plan was for me to speak to you all this afternoon, and then whoever had a guilty conscience could take it to herself and understand that that sort of thing won't do in this Club."

Anne involuntarily let her eyes rest for a moment on Sydney's face as she spoke, and having looked once she looked again.

"There is no use in hinting at disgrace or any such stuff as that," she said with vehemence, staring at Sydney.

The girl looked at her. Sydney was very pale now and there was a strange expression in her eyes that would have attracted the attention even of one who had until now suspected nothing. Anne, looking for something wrong, found even more than she had anticipated. Ruth and Dolly also glanced at Sydney, and were impressed by her appearance. Bertha Macy and Julia Clark, with another object in their minds, stared at her without any attempt to disguise their interest. A common impulse soon spreads among a group of persons. It was not long before it was almost unanimously decided that whatever it was that had been done, Sydney Stuart was the girl who did it.

And what was Sydney thinking? She was conscious that Anne was accusing her of something, Anne, whom until now she had regarded as her best friend in the school. Anne had used the words "guilty" and "disgrace." It meant, of course, that Anne *had heard!* That was it. She knew, and she no longer wished to have Sydney for a friend.

Sydney could not think clearly at this moment. She had already been greatly embarrassed by being called upon to rise and speak in public. She had not had a moment in which to recover herself before this strange and startling accusation had been made, and it was clearly directed against herself. There was a singing in her ears and Anne's voice seemed to come from very far away.

"There must be no underhand ways in this Club," she was saying. "I am just as mad as a hornet about this business. If you have got anything to say about anybody be mighty careful it is true before you begin to talk about it, and then the only thing to do is to come boldly to Ruth or Dolly or Grace King or me and say what you mean and be willing to stand by it. You will find out in time the meaning of 'Kay Cue.' We had the Club all last year and didn't have one particle of trouble. We have all thought it a splendid Club, and I think it will be too bad if any one goes to work and spoils it."

Anne had a temper, and she was letting it go. Sydney did not understand a word that she had said. She only knew that Anne was angry with her, and it must be because she had *heard*! Ruth Carter saw her anguish of mind and was sorry for her, although she was now convinced that Anne had been right from the beginning and that Sydney was really the author of the letters. She felt

that it was time to interpose and stop the president's tirade. She stood up.

"Please, Mr. President, may I speak?" she said.

"Yes, you may," said Anne, shortly, "though I hadn't half finished. What do you want to say?"

"Only that there is a lot of business to be transacted, and time is going. It is quarter of four, and we haven't heard about the family by the duck pond. They were to be visited again, you know."

"Oh, of course," said Anne. "I forgot all about that. Emma Fisher, you went to see them, didn't you? You and Amy Wright. Will Miss Fisher please tell us what they did?"

So Emma Fisher described their visit to the poor family, to whom they had taken some old clothing and some food purchased with contributions of money from two or three of the girls. The Kay Cue See really accomplished some good work, as well as some harm. After this the meeting was brought to a close. There was only time for the usual singing of the Rhyme of Membership.

The undercurrent of suspicion and bad feeling made every one uncomfortable and the girls were glad when it was time to disperse. They broke up into groups of two or three, and in this way walked back to the house. What *was* the trouble? Some-

thing awful, for Anne was so mad. And she was evidently mad with Sydney Stuart. It must be something very serious, for Anne had always seemed to like Sydney until now. What could it be? Well, they would all stand by Anne, for there never was such a nice girl, certainly the most popular girl in school, though she had a terrible temper. As for Sydney—well, no one knew anything about Sydney Stuart. She had always seemed a very nice kind of a girl, really very sweet, but there was no doubt that she had done something horrid. If Anne, who had always liked her, thought so, why of course it must be simply dreadful.

This was the way they all talked—all, that is, with the exception of Ruth Carter and Dolly Fearing—and the result may be imagined. By bedtime, Sydney believed that she had not a friend in the world.

The whole trouble came from exaggerated thinking and too hasty decision. Anne decided that Sydney had written the letters, and in writing them had been guilty of almost a crime. Sydney decided that her family troubles had been discovered and that she was being condemned accordingly; and, worst of all, for they really were the authors of all the mischief, Bertha Macy and Julia Clark, in their thoughtless desire to "pay back"

a girl whom they did not like, and whose dislike of themselves they resented, had made use of dishonorable ways to do her harm and were directly responsible for all the trouble. For of course we know that they had composed the anonymous letters. Julia thought of the scheme, and Bertha, who could disguise her handwriting very cleverly, had carried it out.

It all came from one wrong action on the part of these two girls. The day Sydney received her two letters, it will be remembered that she met Bertha and Julia on the stairs. They saw the communication from the Kay Cue See in her hand, and were at once fired with curiosity to know what she had been called upon to do. Later, when Bertha discovered the envelope on Sydney's table, the temptation to read it became too strong for her to resist. Julia, coming to her room at just this moment, was likewise tempted. They were sure this letter was from the Kay Cue See for the writing on the envelope was precisely the same as that on one which Julia had received the day before. What harm could there be in glancing at the contents? After all, they said to each other, they were members of the same Club, and they knew this note was from the Club. So they argued, and easily succeeded in convincing themselves that it was not such a *very* wrong thing to do. They

would never tell any one, of course, that they had done it.

They promised each other eternal secrecy, and Julia drew out the letter and opened the closely written sheet, while Bertha looked over her shoulder. Each gave an exclamation of surprise but continued to read. For it was the letter from Margaret Stuart to her sister. Sydney had carelessly placed her letters in the wrong envelopes, and the one she had burned in the stove down-stairs had not been her sister's letter containing several references to their family affairs, to Sydney's life at school and her difficulties with her roommate, and the advice to destroy the letter at once.

The girls read every word of it. Bertha understood at once that she was the person referred to as "Miss M." and her wrath was very great. All thought of the dishonor of their actions was forgotten by these two girls engaged in reading some one else's letter. They both knew that they were doing wrong, but they were completely carried away by anger and curiosity as to the affairs of the Stuarts.

"What can it be?" said Julia. "Evidently they are very queer people. They used to live in Baltimore, I know, for Sydney said so once when some one asked her if they had always lived in New York. She said no, and didn't seem to want

to talk about it, and then I asked where they lived before that and she said 'Baltimore,' and when I said, 'Why, that is very near Wilmington, Delaware, where I live,' she got scarlet, the way she does, and wouldn't say another word about it."

"Do you know any one in Baltimore?" asked Bertha.

"Why, yes. I have an aunt who lives there. We always spend Christmas there."

"Then couldn't you find out about them?"

"I shouldn't wonder if I could. I'll do my best."

"And in the meantime I don't think she ought to be allowed in the same club with nice people," said Bertha. "The idea of the sister writing about me and saying I am curious! Sydney must have made up a lot of things about me. I never could bear her."

And then Julia suggested the writing of the anonymous letters, after which they returned Margaret Stuart's letter to the table where they had found it, and left the room, rather elated than otherwise by their day's work.

CHAPTER VIII

NATURALLY enough after this the social relations of most of the girls at the Wickersham School became very much strained. There were few who did not turn away altogether from Sydney, although the trouble was not immediately understood. Something was wrong, and it is so easy to take the worse view of a situation rather than the better. The few who remained friendly towards her were Ruth Carter, Dolly Fearing and a girl named Elsie Brent. Ruth was one who required absolute proof of whatever she was to believe. Until she knew it to be a fact that Sydney had written the letters she could not treat her as though she had done so. Dolly loved peace. To be in a state of hostility with another was to her positive torture. You could see this in her face and in her eyes. Even if Sydney had done greater wrong than writing two anonymous letters about a schoolmate it is doubtful if she would have turned against her entirely.

Elsie Brent remained faithful because she loved Sydney. She was of the same age but was in the class below Anne and Dolly and Sydney, but Sydney, being backward in mathematics, was with her

in arithmetic. Elsie was not clever at her lessons and they had become very friendly over the miseries of a study which both disliked, and Sydney had done one or two little kindnesses for Elsie which had won her heart. Elsie was an unusual girl. She was fifteen and was very tall for her age, with heavy dark hair and a face that would have been plain had it not been for her wonderful eyes. They were large and dark and honest. She was not shy, but she was of a reticent nature that made her slow in gaining friends. She did not mind this. She preferred to read, very often, rather than join in the games or the conversation. It was no hardship for her to walk alone. She was perfectly indifferent to the fascination of Anne Talbot or of any one else whom the other girls "raved" about, but she had given her allegiance to Sydney Stuart and with the strength of her nature she remained faithful. Sydney was quite unconscious of the depth and quality of her affection, and it is doubtful if she ever would have known it if events had not taken place to call it forth.

Sydney felt very much alone during the first few days after the meeting of the Kay Cue See described in the last chapter. She was so sure that Anne was alienated because of the trouble in her own family that she made no effort at reconcilia-

tion. She could not explain this trouble, and she was too proud to beg Anne to overlook it without explanation. Anne, on the contrary, really liked Sydney, but believing that she had written the letters, became more and more indignant with her because she did not come forward and apologize for having done so and try to straighten the matter out. Ruth and Dolly could not succeed in modifying her views. Anne was a very determined young person, and it was difficult to convince her that she was ever in the wrong. And matters were in this state when something else happened, and as is very often the case, the weather played an important part in bringing it about.

Indian summer was quickly over, and immediately afterwards winter set in. The days were short now, and dreary. Clouds gathered or rain fell nearly every day, and at last one morning—it was the day before Thanksgiving—the inhabitants of Kingsbridge awoke to find it snowing. This first flurry did not last long, however, and by noon the sun was shining fitfully, although a bank of clouds in the west suggested that more snow might be coming soon.

The pupils did not go home to pass Thanksgiving. The holidays at that time were not long enough to make it worth while. There was no school that day or Friday, however, and it was a

season of leisure and fun. Those of the girls who were so fortunate as to know some of the residents of Kingsbridge were invited to their homes, and some had been asked to bring friends with them. Anne Talbot had been long engaged to go to a supper party on Thanksgiving night to be given by a Mrs. Tracy, who was her mother's cousin and who lived in a large house at some distance from the Wickersham School. Mrs. Tracy had also invited three of Anne's friends, and Anne had selected Dolly Fearing, Ruth Carter and Sydney Stuart. It was considered the proper thing to do to ask one of the new girls of the year, and Anne had chosen Sydney. This of course was before the trouble. Sydney now felt very uncomfortable about it but hesitated to give it up. She did not know what she ought to do. Of course Anne said nothing. She could not request Sydney to stay at home, though there was no doubt that she would be relieved if Sydney would herself suggest it.

The afternoon before Thanksgiving Day, Sydney, having gained permission to take a walk, started out alone from the gates of the Wickersham School and turning away from the town and towards the open country, she walked rapidly along the road. She had not gone far when she heard quick footsteps behind her while her name was called in a rather breathless voice. She looked back and saw

Elsie Brent running fast in her efforts to overtake her. Sydney felt a moment's regret. She would much rather walk alone this afternoon. She told herself she wanted to be alone and think things over. Of course it would have been the very worst occupation possible, but she did not realize this. Thinking things over in solitude very often makes one take an unfortunate view of them.

There was nothing to do but wait for Elsie, who soon caught up to her.

"I saw you going off, and I thought I would come with you," said Elsie. "I had asked Miss Wickersham if I could go to walk and I was going alone, but I would a great deal rather come with you, if you don't mind."

This was a great compliment on Elsie's part had Sydney but known it. It was not often that she ran after another girl in order to walk with her.

"Oh, all right," said Sydney, not very cordially.

"You don't want me, do you?" said Elsie, in her blunt fashion. She was a girl of few words but they were usually very much to the point. "But I am coming all the same. I want to tell you something, and this seems a good chance to do it. Which way are you going?"

"I was going up the lane that leads off from this road, and over the hill into those woods that are beyond. I love woods in winter. But I would

just as lieve go any other way if you would rather."

"No, I like that, and it will give us a good chance to talk, for you don't meet the other girls up there much. They all love going to the town and buying candy. I don't mind the candy but I hate the shops. Have some?"

She had thrust her hand into her ulster pocket and brought out a paper bag containing some of the famous Tinkham caramels, that were so deservedly popular year after year with the girls at the Wickersham School.

Sydney accepted the proffered dainties, and being a perfectly normal girl, was rather glad after all that Elsie had joined her. One must be very eccentric and morbid not to be mollified by a gift of caramels when one is a schoolgirl and apparently deserted by one's other friends.

"I saw you sneaking off," continued Elsie, "and I knew you'd end by crying if you were off by yourself. You're having a horrid time, and I just want to tell you——" here utterance was stopped for a moment by her inability to manage the caramel.

"You needn't tell me anything," interposed Sydney hastily. "If people want to drop me they can. I don't care."

"Oh, yes, you do!" cried Elsie, now able to speak fluently once more. "You care very much.

Any one would care. I don't know what all the trouble is about, but I do know that I don't give up my friends for any trifle. You were good to me that day I got stuck in my arithmetic and explained things better than any teacher. I've never forgotten it. And I like you."

"You say you don't know what the trouble is?"

"No, and what is more, I don't care. If a person is once my friend they're always my friend."

"It is very nice of you to say that, Elsie, but perhaps if you knew what the trouble really was you would feel different. Perhaps even you wouldn't overlook what it is."

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed Elsie. "I have an idea about it and I don't mind in the least. There's a lot of talk and I don't know how much is true and how much isn't. After all, what does it matter if you did write the letters. It wasn't such a crime."

"Letters?" repeated Sydney, somewhat mystified. "I don't know what you mean."

"Well, I'm sure I don't either. Don't let's talk about it. I only want you to understand that I am your friend whatever happens. You can just depend on that."

To Elsie's great surprise and possibly a little to her dismay, for she was very undemonstrative,

Sydney stopped in the lane and putting her arms around her friend's neck, began to cry.

"There, I knew you were intending to cry, but I thought I could head it off," said Elsie. "Instead of that I seem to have brought it on."

"I can't help it," murmured Sydney. "I j-just c-can't help it. I've been feeling so badly and now to f-find that you—you ——"

"Oh, come now!" exclaimed Elsie, but very kindly. "Just hush up, Syd! What did you take me for, anyway? You must have thought I was a pretty sort of a girl to turn against a friend the minute she got into any scrape. Why, that's the time to stand by them. I don't know what Anne Talbot is thinking of. I didn't suppose she was the kind of a girl to give you up as soon as trouble comes."

"She has good reason for it," said Sydney, hastily. "Very likely I should feel the same way if I were in her place. It isn't that I have done anything myself, but some people mind things that—that have happened in other people's families."

"I don't know what under the sun you are talking about," said Elsie, her honest face looking very much puzzled, "but as I said, you needn't try to explain to me if you don't want to. Of course if it is going to relieve your mind to talk things over, you can do it, but as far as I am concerned it

doesn't make a bit of difference. I haven't heard what any one supposes it to be, except some stuff about letters, and I'm sure I don't care whether you wrote them or not as far as my feelings for you go, though I would rather my friends didn't do anything underhand."

"That is the second time you have said something about letters," said Sydney. "I wish you would tell me what letters you mean."

"Well, I won't. I don't really know. You know the girls don't care for me very much. I don't care for many of them, and I have only heard a lot of buzzing and haven't asked a question. I may have gotten it all wrong. Don't let's talk about it, Syd."

"Well, we won't. But there is something I should like to ask your advice about. Ever so long ago Anne asked me to go with her to Mrs. Tracy's. She is some relation of hers, you know, and Anne is going there to a Thanksgiving party and was told she could bring some friends, and she asked me. Mrs. Tracy wrote me a very nice note, inviting me, and I accepted. Now I don't know what to do about it. Of course I know Anne doesn't want me to go. It makes me feel dreadfully to go where I know I am not wanted, but I don't know how to explain to Mrs. Tracy that I can't come. What *shall* I do?"

It did indeed seem a very difficult proposition, and Elsie, having had very little experience of the world, was uncertain as to the proper course to be pursued. But though she had had no experience she did possess a fair amount of common sense. She thought the matter over a few minutes.

"Do the Miss Wickershams know anything about all this?" she asked presently.

"They know—they know about our troubles," said Sydney, hesitatingly. "I don't know whether they know about all this fuss."

"I shouldn't wonder if they did. They usually know everything. Why don't you talk it over with Miss Jennie? She could advise you."

"Oh, I couldn't!" exclaimed Sydney. "I just couldn't. And besides, Margaret advised me not to talk about it with any one."

"Margaret? Your sister, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose she knows best. But wasn't that before any of this fuss?"

"Yes. Before I left home."

"Perhaps she wouldn't say the same thing now. If she knew all about everything now perhaps she would advise you to talk to Miss Jennie."

"No, I don't think she would."

"Well, of course you know what she would say better than I do."

"But I don't see how I can go to that party with Anne," continued Sydney. "Ruth and Dolly are the others who are going, and they haven't been disagreeable to me, but they have been a little cool, and Anne—oh, Anne has been like an icicle! And oh, Elsie, I do care for her so much. That is the worst of it. I am so fond of her still, even though she is so queer and has turned against me so!"

Elsie was silent. Her loyal heart suffered. She could not help feeling a pang of jealousy. She knew Sydney cared a great deal more for Anne than she did for her even now, and she did so long to be first with her. But she struggled against the feeling which she knew to be an unworthy one, and presently she was able to speak in her usual voice.

"I suppose it is hard for you," she said. "Yes, it is very hard when you care so much for a person not to have them believe in you and stick to you."

"Can nothing be done to bring her back to liking me?" asked Sydney. "What would you do?"

Again Elsie was silent. Then she said: "I think I should keep right on caring for her, and trust to its getting straight again some day. If I could, I would go to her and say, 'See here, something's wrong and I want to explain it if I can.'"

"I can't do that," interposed Sydney. "I simply *can't* tell her the family trouble."

"Very well, then, the only thing you can do is to wait. But about going to-morrow night. I am sure I don't know how to advise you."

But the matter was destined to be settled for Sydney without the advice of any one.

All the time they had been talking the girls had pursued their way steadily up the lane and through the woods. They had paid no heed to time or weather, and had not noticed that the bank of clouds which had darkened the Western horizon had been moving steadily forward until now the sky was completely over-cast. In the woods they did not think about the sky, nor feel the wind, and therefore when they came out into the open they were surprised to find that it was snowing and that it was rapidly growing colder. They were rather glad than otherwise to see the snow for it gave promise of coasting, and the hills about Kingsbridge were fine for that sport. They continued on their way and soon were talking about other matters than the one which had so absorbed them.

"I think there is a short cut across this field that leads to a road," said Sydney; "a sort of a back road, that takes you over to the woods back of the school. We might go home that way."

"All right," assented Elsie, "if you are sure it does. It looks as if we were going to have a regular storm and we had better get back by the shortest way."

"This is ever so much shorter. I am quite sure it is and I know just how to get there. I came up here one day a few weeks ago, just after school began. Ruth Carter was with me and she showed it to me. We climb the wall here and go right across to that opposite corner."

They climbed the low stone wall and set out across the field. But it is one thing to find one's way on a clear bright day when one can see a long distance and note familiar landmarks, such as the position of certain hills, or the spires of the town, or the course of the river which could be seen from here, and quite another matter to lay one's course, as they say at sea, when a blinding snow squall is raging and all those landmarks are blotted out of sight. For the snow was falling now with all the vigor of a winter storm. The wind had risen and was blowing it into swirling eddies, sending it against their faces and into their eyes. It was great fun at first, and the girls laughed and bent their heads to meet its fury, hurrying across the field, stumbling into holes and over stones, for it was a New England pasture and was therefore rough and rocky.

On they went for what seemed a very long time.

"This must be a very big pasture," said Elsie at last. "Shouldn't you think we would soon get across it?"

"It seems to take ever so much longer than it did that other time," replied Sydney, "but I suppose this cold wind makes it seem so. We'll get to the other side soon, I am sure."

But it was half an hour before they reached the stone wall which surrounded the pasture. Unable to see where they were going they had been walking round and round, almost in a circle. At last they came to a wall.

"Here we are!" cried Sydney, joyfully; "and here is the road. I knew we should find it if we only kept straight on. Now we turn to the right and very soon we get to those other woods, and then it is all as easy as possible."

But they had reached a wall which was on quite an opposite side of the pasture to what she imagined. There was a road there which had the appearance of the one she was looking for, and without a moment's doubt she turned to the right and struck out as she supposed for the Wickersham School, but instead of this they were every moment leaving it behind them and going farther and farther away. The storm showed no sign of

abating, and in fact was getting worse. The snow already lay thick on the ground, and the wind grew stronger and colder. It was the beginning of a snow-storm that proved to be a memorable one, which although it came in November caused great damage and loss of life all over the country.

And these two girls were quite lost, hurrying as best they could into the open country and the heart of the storm.

CHAPTER IX

"SYDNEY, I believe we are going wrong," said Elsie, fifteen or twenty minutes later. "We ought surely to have reached those woods back of the school by this time."

The same thought had been in Sydney's mind but she would not yet acknowledge it.

"Oh, we can't be!" she said. "Of course it seems very long in this awful storm. I never felt such a cold wind, and it is so dreadful not to see more than a yard in front of us. That is the reason it doesn't look natural."

"But the woods," persisted Elsie; "I don't see why we don't get to those woods. I am afraid we have lost our way."

"I don't see myself why we don't get to them, but we can't be lost, Elsie. We couldn't possibly be lost."

A little later she was forced to agree that they were.

"I am sure we should have come to some houses before this," she said. "There were certainly houses on that road. I remember especially a farmhouse, for there was a big black dog that came

out and barked at us. If we could only come to a house we might go in and ask our way."

"Or stay there until it stops snowing," remarked Elsie. "Oh, how my fingers ache! Aren't you nearly frozen?"

"Yes, I am. What *are* we to do? Shall we turn and go back along this road? Do you suppose we could find that pasture again and cross it and go back by the road we came?"

"I am sure we could never find it. We must have gone wrong while we were crossing the field and I should be afraid to try it again even if we found the pasture. If only some one would come along this road!"

"No one will do that. It looks as if no one ever went over it. If we only could come to a sign-board or something! And it must be getting very late, Elsie. What will they think at the school?"

"That we are lost in the snow-storm. Perhaps they will send out to look for us. I am afraid they will never find us."

Even in the midst of their anxiety as to their whereabouts it occurred to Sydney to wonder if Anne would care. Would she be worried at her disappearance? Oh, if Anne would only care a little Sydney felt that she would be repaid for any amount of physical suffering! And they were both suffering, and without speaking of it to the other

each was thinking that it would be impossible to hold out much longer.

"I think it would be better to turn," said Elsie. "Evidently we are going into the depths of the country, and if we go the other way we shall surely get back to Kingsbridge somehow. We won't leave the road for any field, but just follow it until we get somewhere. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I do. Come on."

They turned and began to retrace their steps. Already their former footprints had been obliterated by the falling snow, or the wind, which was blowing it about and causing it to drift badly.

"Hark!" said Sydney presently. "I am sure I hear a horse coming. Oh, Elsie, there is something coming!"

It certainly sounded like a swiftly trotting horse, and almost immediately its shape loomed through the storm, coming from the direction in which they had been walking before they turned.

"Stop him! Stop him!" cried Elsie. "Don't let him get by!"

They waved their arms and called. The horse shied badly at this unexpected sight, but the driver pulled him up and held him in.

"Can you tell us the way to Kingsbridge?" asked Sydney. "We are lost and nearly frozen. Is it this way or that?"



"OH, ELSIE, THERE IS SOMETHING COMING"



7



"You were going in the right direction," replied the young man, "but you are miles away from the town. I am going there myself. Won't you let me take you? I should be very glad to."

His voice was pleasant and was that of a gentleman. He was muffled in a fur coat with its collar turned up, and a seal skin cap was drawn down over his ears. The part of his face that could be seen showed it to be that of a young man.

"Oh, thank you!" cried both the girls together. "Can you really take us?"

"Of course I can, if you don't mind being a bit crowded. I would give you my seat and sit on the floor behind but I am afraid you couldn't manage this horse. He is something of a high-flyer anyway and he doesn't like the storm. If one of you will sit beside me and the other climb in at the back—I am awfully sorry I can't get out and help you, but I don't dare."

"Oh, we can get in all right," said the girls. "I never was so thankful in my life," added Sydney. "I think we should have perished with cold if we had had to be out much longer, and never have found our way either."

By this time they had both climbed in, Sydney beside their rescuer and Elsie in the open space behind on the floor. It was a light road wagon with no top.

"You will be colder still, driving," said the young man. "Here, one of you take this robe and wrap it round you, and there is a horse blanket under the seat for the other, if you don't mind using it. If I had known I was to have the pleasure of two lady passengers I should have provided wraps."

They all laughed. "If we had known we were going to take a drive we should have worn extra ones ourselves," said Sydney. "We don't usually expect people to provide coats as well as carriages when they take us to drive."

She had quite forgotten to be shy. Indeed it would be out of the question to be shy when rescued in a snow-storm, especially by such a very friendly and nice young man as this appeared to be.

"I suppose you are at the Wickersham School?" he said presently.

"Yes, and what Miss Wickersham is thinking of us now I don't know. What *will* she say?"

"I don't see how she can blame you. No one ever supposed such a storm as this was coming up. Anyhow, just refer her to me. I will sign a certificate before the Notary Public, testifying that I came across you in a half-frozen condition a good five miles away from Kingsbridge. By the way, I must tell you my name or you won't know whom

to refer to. Alexander Tracy at your service, Residence, High Street, Kingsbridge, Harvard Class of '82. Now, without seeming too forward, might I ask your names?"

"Elsie Brent, behind you, and Sydney Stuart beside you. And oh! you must be Mrs. Tracy's son! I have heard of you."

"I certainly claim that honor and I'm so glad my fame has spread so far. Do you know my mother?"

"She asked me to come to her party to-morrow night with Anne Talbot."

"Good! I knew you must be a friend of ours. I've been home only since this morning so I hadn't heard the particulars about to-morrow night. Anne is my cousin, you know. I'm glad she's a friend of yours. Isn't she jolly?"

"Yes," said Sydney, and then was silent. She had forgotten her troubles for a time. Now they descended upon her again. After all, Anne was not her friend!

"But I am not sure I can come," she added.

"Why not? Oh, I hope you will. Oh, do please say you will! Why on earth shouldn't you?"

It was of course impossible to explain, and with this very cordial young man beside her, urging her to be there and demanding her reasons for not

being there and—he certainly was very nice. It would be such fun to go. Even if Anne did not want her, even with that black cloud upon the horizon, it might be fun. But still she hesitated.

"I don't know," she said at last. "I accepted Mrs. Tracy's invitation and have been hoping to go, but lately something has turned up and I thought I might have to write her I couldn't be there but—perhaps I can come."

"Good! Now you've promised, and you've got to keep it. We'll give you a jolly good time. I've got a chum there. He's my roommate at Cambridge, Fred Merriam. He was coming with me this afternoon but my mother got him to go with her over to Brookville to buy 'fixings' for the party. I had to go to a farm way back in the country to get the turkey for to-morrow's dinner. It's under the seat. By the way, Miss Brent," he said turning to speak to Elsie, "I hope that gobbler isn't in your way."

There was no answer. Sydney looked over her shoulder. Elsie was crouching in the bottom of the wagon. Her face could not be seen.

"Elsie! why don't you answer? What is the matter?" exclaimed Sydney. "She must be ill! Elsie! She is ill! Do stop and let me get out."

"Better keep right on," said Alec Tracy, touching his horse with the whip. "There is no dan-

ger of her falling out in that position and the sooner we get her into a warm house the better. She must have fainted."

"She said her hands were fearfully cold. She was in perfect agony."

"That's it, then. It is horrible pain. I knew a fellow who fainted once from that very cause."

Sydney was leaning over the back of the seat and had her arm around her friend. They were going along at great speed, but she did not notice this nor the fact that they were entering the town. Presently they turned in at a wide gate and stopped in front of a large yellow house with white fluted columns. Then she looked up.

"Why, where are we?" she asked. "Haven't you brought us to the school?"

"No, our house is ever so much nearer, for I took a short cut to get here. I thought your friend ought to get indoors as quickly as we could manage it, and my mother will look after her. She loves to look after people."

A man who had evidently been watching for him came around the side of the house and held the horse while he got out and helped Sydney to alight.

"Pretty bad storm, Thomas," he said pleasantly. "These two young ladies got caught in it and one of them is ill."

Then he turned to Elsie. He was very tall and broad, and he lifted her from the carriage and walked up the steps of the piazza with her in his arms as easily as though she had been a baby. "Just open the front door," he said to Sydney. "We can go right in. I hope mother has got home."

She did as he bade her and they entered the house. They were all three covered with snow. He placed Elsie on the sofa in the broad hall which extended from the front to the back of the house. "You look after her. Take off her things and rub her hands. We mustn't take her too near the fire at first. I will get mother or somebody."

In a moment Mrs. Tracy was with them. She came quickly down-stairs, her face full of concern. "You poor children!" she exclaimed. "Here, take away these cushions. She must lie very flat. Ah, she is opening her eyes."

Slowly Elsie came back to the present out of a blackness and distance that seemed to her interminable. "Where am I?" she murmured. "Sydney, are we quite lost? But there was a carriage and—why, where am I?"

She tried to sit up but they would not let her, making her more comfortable now with pillows.

"You are quite safe," said Mrs. Tracy in her kind voice. "Here is Sydney, and you are all right."

"Did I faint?" asked Elsie. "It was my hands. The pain was awful. I fainted once before from pain. Sydney, why aren't we at school?"

"Mr. Tracy brought us here as it was nearer, when we found you were ill. We must go home as soon as you are able, Elsie."

"Indeed you are not going back to the school to-night," interposed Mrs. Tracy. "I could not possibly allow it. I will send a note to Miss Wickersham explaining it. I think you must be Sydney Stuart whom I am expecting here to-morrow night, are you not? A friend of my young cousin, Anne Talbot."

"Yes, she is, mother," said Alec, coming forward. He had kept in the background until Elsie revived. "She is Miss Stuart and that is her friend Miss Brent. I found them a good five miles from here. Don't let them go back to the school to-night. I am sure it would not do for Miss Brent to go out in the cold again."

"Oh, but I could," said Sydney. "I think I ought to go."

"You must let me decide for you this time," said Mrs. Tracy. "Apart from every other reason, I should like to keep you over night. Here I am with two young men on my hands already and two more boys coming, and what I was going to do to amuse them all I did not know. Now we

can have games and all sorts of fun, and as for you, I am sure you won't be sorry to have a little visit in a house that is not a school. I went to boarding school myself. *I know!*"

It was impossible to resist her pleasant manner. She was a young-looking woman with a charming face and humorous eyes.

"Good for you, mother!" said Alec. "Shall I take the note?"

"No, I think it would be more discreet to send Thomas with it. I will go write it. Shall I ask her to send me some of your things? Not dresses, for you both look as nice as possible. I will tell you what I will do! I will write another note to Anne and ask her to put up what you need for the night."

"Oh, no! Not Anne!" exclaimed Sydney, and then stopped.

"Well, she is rather heedless, I must confess," laughed Mrs. Tracy. "I will leave her out of it, then."

She went into the library to her desk. Alec followed her to ask some questions and the girls were alone.

"Do you think we ought to stay, Elsie?" demanded Sydney. "I feel like an impostor. I am not Anne's friend."

"She didn't ask us because you were, but be-

cause I was such an idiot as to faint," replied Elsie. "I don't see how we can do anything else but stay. It would be rude to insist on going when she is so kind, and they wouldn't let us walk, so it would make a lot of trouble getting out a horse. I think we had better stay. It will be more polite—and I shouldn't worry about all that, Sydney. As long as we are here, let's be as nice as we can."

Mrs. Tracy soon returned, and Alec took the note to the man.

"Are you feeling better, Elsie?" she said. "I am not going to call you by any more formal title. I am very fond of girls, though I have nothing but sons. They are pretty nice though. If you feel stronger we might go up-stairs to your room. But wait! I will have some tea made and you shall drink that before you stir."

She rang the bell and gave the order, and very soon the maid brought in a big tray filled with old-fashioned silver and dainty old china, and, better still, delicious bread and butter and fascinating cookies, and tea. Alec came back and immediately went in search of his friend, Fred Merriam. He found him up in the boys' "den" at the top of the house aimlessly strumming on a banjo. Fred Merriam was a long lank fellow with a solemn face. In fact he rarely smiled himself, but he possessed

the happy faculty of making other people laugh. His sense of humor was very keen and he had an unending stock of funny stories and quaint ideas which made him invaluable as a guest or a companion. He and Alec Tracy had been chums at boarding school before they entered the same class at Harvard.

"I say, old Merry, what do you think?" exclaimed Alec, bursting into the room.

"I never think, my dear fellow," said Merriam gravely. "But I *know* that you have succeeded in spoiling the only tune I have been able to catch this afternoon. Why this agitation?"

"Do you call that a tune? But if you had just rescued two beautiful damsels from being lost in a snow-storm you would be agitated. If you had driven them home and found that one had fainted on your carriage floor, you would again be agitated. If you had carried her into the house, staggering under the unwonted burden ——"

"Oh, come now, Trace, it would take more than that to make you stagger, unless she happens to be Barnum's Fat Lady. I suppose they were two of Wicky's girls. I should like to have seen Wicky's face when her charges were brought home in that style. What did she say?"

"Say! She has not yet said. I didn't take them to the school. Not I! They are here, down-

stairs at this very minute, drinking tea, and I've come to fetch you to help them drink it. Come on!"

"Alexander Tracy! Two girls in the house all this time and you never told me! If I don't pay you up and cut you out, my name is Norval-on-the Grampian-Hills ——"

He cast aside the banjo and the two ran downstairs. By the time they reached the top of the last flight they slackened their unseemly gait and two very proper and solemn young men walked decorously down to join the tea party.

They were not solemn long, however, and very soon Sydney and Elsie felt as completely at home as though they had been drinking tea together for years. There was an atmosphere of cordiality and friendliness in this household that was very pleasant to the two schoolgirls.

"How kind you all are!" exclaimed Sydney impulsively, when there was a sudden pause in the conversation. "What should we have done if you hadn't come along when you did, Mr. Tracy?"

"That was my good luck," said Alec.

"I should say so," said Fred Merriam mournfully. "'Tis ever thus. Alec Tracy was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, or perhaps it would be more correct this time to call the article a silver snow shovel. Metaphorically speaking, he dug

you out of a drift, and it must have been a pleasant pastime. I once dug a girl out of a drift."

"You did!" said Alec. "You never told me a word about it, Merry! When, where and who?"

"In Cambridge, my dear boy. It is impossible to tell you all my adventures, they come upon me so thick and fast."

"But who was it? That pretty girl who lives on Brattle Street, I bet!"

"No, I never heard the lady's name nor where she lived, but she was a charming creature."

"Oh, come now. You must know something about her."

Merriam paused a moment and his face grew sadder. "She proved to be an aged beggar," he said, "and all she said was, 'Be off wid yer, now. Yer be after helpin' yerself to me pocketbook and yer adds insult ter injury by tryin' ter set me on me feet.'"

"And what did you do?" asked Mrs. Tracy, when the laugh had subsided.

"I ran for all I was worth. She was so positive about the pocketbook that I began to feel as though I really had it. Just assume a positive manner and you can make the other fellow believe anything you choose. The beggar lady must have been fully aware of that psychological fact."

"I am glad my young ladies didn't treat me so

harshly," said Alec, with satisfaction. "They have never mentioned their pocketbooks."

"Without wishing to appear to be prying into their affairs," said Merriam, "I merely venture to suggest that it may have been for the same reason as that which caused a young philosopher named Johnny to neglect his supper."

"Why was that?" asked Sydney.

"Because, alas! he hadn't any."

Then they all laughed again—it takes very little to make a party of young people laugh, I am glad to say,—and then when all the food had been eaten, Mrs. Tracy and the girls went up-stairs, Elsie now quite herself again and Sydney feeling happier than she had for some days.

CHAPTER X

THE evening proved to be one of the most delightful that either Sydney or Elsie had ever passed. They did not have supper until very late, for it was almost eight o'clock when Mrs. Tracy's other sons arrived, the trains having been delayed by the storm which continued to rage with unabated fury. Hugh was older than Alec and had just entered Harvard Law School. Jim was younger and was at boarding school. They all came home to spend Thanksgiving with their mother, to whom it was easy to see they were devoted, treating her with a deference and a courtesy which were charming, and at the same time as their best and dearest friend. Their father had been dead for several years.

It was certainly a novel and unexpected development in their affairs for Sydney and Elsie to find themselves in such a household. The night before this they had been seated at the long bare table at school dutifully eating their bread and butter and stewed prunes. To-night, they were the guests of a lady whom they both already admired with all the ardor of their schoolgirl hearts, for even Elsie, who did not so easily give

her affection as Sydney, had been won at once by Mrs. Tracy's kindness and hospitality. They were seated at a bountiful supper table in a spacious room, where the massive mahogany sideboard and table, the quaint high-backed chairs, the family portraits on the walls, the dainty silver and glass and china, and the soft light shed by the candles in the tall silver candlesticks made the scene a sort of homelike Fairyland to them—if such an extraordinary combination as home and Fairyland can be imagined. Added to this was the companionship of four boys who appeared to be the nicest and jolliest four boys ever gathered together at one supper table. And this wonderful change in the fortunes of Sydney and Elsie had been brought about by being caught in a snow-storm!

"What are you thinking about, Miss Stuart?" asked Alec. "I have been watching you, and you haven't said anything for five minutes and you look as if you were pondering affairs of state."

"I was thinking what a lucky thing it was that Elsie and I went to walk this afternoon, and that we didn't take our muffs. If we had had muffs, Elsie's hands wouldn't have been cold and she wouldn't have fainted and you wouldn't have brought us here instead of taking us back to the school, and—oh, everything would have been horrid instead of being simply perfect as it is!"

They all laughed at her enthusiasm.

"The moral of it is, never carry a muff," said Alec.

"And the best part of it all is," added Sydney, "that Mrs. Tracy doesn't talk alphabetically. Why, we could discuss zebras if we wanted to."

"What on earth do you mean? And why should you want to discuss zebras?" asked Hugh.

"I don't. I never thought they were in the least interesting, but you know Miss Wickersham has a new topic for each night, and we think she goes straight through the alphabet. When you are obliged to discuss something beginning with a G for instance, you long to change the subject and bring up zebras."

"Zebras would be as hard for me to talk about as anything else," remarked Elsie mournfully. "I don't seem to know a thing about any subject Miss Wickersham chooses. Last night it was glaciers."

"She must have felt the approach of the storm and the cold wave," said Hugh laughing. "What on earth did she say about glaciers?"

"Oh, she discoursed about them, and I must confess I didn't half listen, and then when she pounced on me and asked me what was the most remarkable fact in connection with them I couldn't

think of anything to say except that they were composed of ice."

"Did anybody answer right?" asked Jim, who was deeply interested.

"Yes, of course Bertha Macy did," said Sydney. "She always says the right thing."

"Yes," said Elsie. "She is Miss Wickersham's favorite scholar, for that very reason. She told about the slow movement of glaciers, and she knew all about somebody's husband who was lost in one, and twenty years later the wife went to the place in the Alps and waited, and presently around came the glacier and her husband was in it."

"Alive?" asked Jim, in awestruck tones, and then was overwhelmed by the roar of laughter from his brothers and Merriam.

"You silly!" they cried. "Oh, you little tiny kid! What kind of a school do you go to, anyway?"

"The same one you went to yourselves," retorted Jim. "And I must say, you're not much of an advertisement for St. Paul's."

"So Bertha Macy is the favorite, is she?" said Mrs. Tracy a moment later when the laugh had again subsided. "I had a note from Anne to-night, brought by Thomas when he came with your bags, asking me if she could bring her to-morrow night. Of course I am very glad to have her do so. The

more the merrier is the rule in this house. Elsie, I want you to be here too. Now, my dear, don't say you can't, for we know you can! We will settle all that to-morrow morning."

"How does Anne get along in the conversation at supper?" asked Alec. "Does she know anything about glaciers or zebras?"

"She is always very bright and says something funny," said Elsie, after waiting a moment for Sydney to speak.

Sydney, however, was silent, and her face had grown scarlet. Of this she was perfectly well aware, which naturally made her blush more deeply than ever, until her crimson cheeks were noticeable to every one. Jim stared at her, and with the candor of the small boy was about to comment upon it, but Alec diverted his mind by a timely allusion to football as played at St. Paul's School. Privately Alec was wondering what the trouble was. He had noticed already that whenever Anne's name had been mentioned Sydney Stuart had appeared very much embarrassed. Alec Tracy was a young man of keen power of observation, and very little escaped him.

Nothing more was said on this subject, for Mrs. Tracy began to speak of something else and Sydney's cheeks had time to cool. In the evening games were played until bedtime, and then the

girls were taken by Mrs. Tracy to the guest-room in which she had already established them.

"I hope you will rest well in my old four-poster," she said as she bade them good-night. "I can't tell you how pleased I am to have you here. I want you to stay with me until day after tomorrow. I will make it all right with Miss Wickersham. You must just make up your minds to be my guests until Friday morning. Good-night, my dears."

She left them without giving them time to reply.

"What are we to do about it, Elsie?" asked Sydney, sitting in the big chintz-covered rocking-chair and looking very anxious. "Or rather what am I to do about it? It is all right for you to stay, but how can I without explaining, or something? Mrs. Tracy will think it so queer when Anne gets here and is so cool and distant, the way she has been lately."

Elsie surveyed her friend for an instant without replying. Then she began to brush her hair with a vigor that bade fair to pull it out by the roots. "You make me mad," she said at last.

"Why, Elsie!" exclaimed Sydney, much amazed.

"Yes, you make me mad. I think you are a perfect goose."

"I should like to know why," said Sydney, with

as much dignity as she could muster when on the verge of tears.

"Well, I will tell you why." Elsie ceased brushing, and her hair, which was very thick, hung like a bush around her face. "Here we are in this perfect house, with that dear perfect Mrs. Tracy doing everything for us, and those nice boys and everything lovely, and you go and make yourself miserable over Anne—what Anne thinks and does and says, and what she is going to think and do and say! What difference does it make, anyway? You know you haven't done anything wrong. Whatever the trouble is that all this fuss is about, there doesn't seem to be anything very wicked. I am sure I can't believe you have done anything dreadful or you would be the very one to own up to it. You are making a terrible mystery of whatever you think it is, but if you must do that, why you must. But as to being in such a state about Anne, and whether she is going to like your being here, why, I think it isn't worth while. Let her come and be cool, if she wants to. Who cares? Just be independent. I'm sure I should not be so much affected by any girl's opinion, no matter how fond I was of her. Do get up a little spirit, Sydney. Don't be such an idiot."

Sydney was so surprised by this sudden attack that she forgot to be angry. At one time she had

been very near crying, but that danger was successfully passed and then the excellent sense of Elsie's remarks gradually became evident to her. After all, why should she care so much? If she had done nothing wrong, why should she tremble so beneath Anne's displeasure? She would not! She rose from the rocking chair and cast her arms about Elsie's neck.

"You are perfectly hateful to scold so, but a dear, all the same," said she. "I believe I will take your advice."

"Good!" said Elsie, very much pleased. She was afraid she had said almost too much in her zeal, and she was greatly relieved to find that Sydney took it so good-naturedly.

When they awoke the next morning it was still snowing, but by eleven o'clock it ceased and there were signs of clearing. It had drifted badly and lay in great masses against the windows on one side of the house, and was on a level with the fence in some places, while in others there was not so much to be seen. The boys were out early, digging paths and investigating the state of affairs as far as they could penetrate. They reported the worst storm they had ever known, in which Thomas agreed with them. No one had passed the house as yet, and it would be impossible to go over the road until it was broken out by the town sledges, which

were always sent out with oxen and men in such times as these.

The girls went out for a time and did some digging and snowballing, but it was very cold and they were not sorry to come indoors and help Mrs. Tracy with her preparations for the evening. She was an old-fashioned housekeeper, and when company was expected she washed the extra china and silver herself, and in this she was glad to have the assistance of the two young girls.

"Now, I suppose you will wish to get your best frocks, or whatever you intended to wear to-night," said she, when the last cup had been carefully wiped and the last fork placed with its mates in the silver-basket. "The sun seems to be trying to break through the clouds now, and I have no doubt that it will clear within an hour or so. Snow-storms don't last very long, which is fortunate when they are as bad as this. But the question of getting over the road to the school is a serious one. We will have the sleigh out this afternoon and see what can be done. If we can't get there you will have to content yourself with what you have on. You both look very nice, and I can lend you some bits of lace and *tulle* to wear around your necks."

It was quite the fashion in those days for even very young girls to turn in their collars and wear

folds of white *tulle*, or a lace *fichu* crossed in front when they wished to appear a little more elaborately dressed in the evening, thus making themselves look years older than girls of the present day of the same age. Anne Talbot was an object of the envy and admiration of the whole Wickersham School because she had a blue silk dress with a train, and although simply made, the waist was cut in the style described. Sydney and Elsie knew that she intended wearing this gown to the Thanksgiving party, and naturally were anxious to dress as well as they could themselves, so they hoped that it would be possible to reach the school and procure their possessions.

The Thanksgiving turkey, with all its attendant good things, was eaten at one o'clock, an early hour being chosen in order that there might be time for something of a sleigh ride before dark. The big three-seated sleigh with two horses came to the door as soon as dinner was eaten, and well wrapped up in fur garments, the party set forth. Each seat held three persons comfortably, and Mrs. Tracy's plan was to go to the school and ask Anne Talbot to take the sleigh ride with them, while at the same time Sydney and Elsie could get what they needed for the evening.

When they reached the schoolhouse she went indoors with them to explain matters to Miss Wick-

ersham. It was always impossible to resist Mrs. Tracy's appeals, and Miss Wickersham agreed at once to all that she desired, so the girls went up to their rooms and Anne was sent for to come to the parlor and see her cousin. She ran down-stairs upon receiving the summons and met the girls as they were going up.

"Holloa, Anne!" said Sydney pleasantly. "We've had the greatest adventures. Did you hear how we were caught in the storm and your cousin rescued us and drove us home?"

"Yes," said Anne, without stopping. She scarcely looked at Sydney and said no more. She continued on her way to the parlor. Miss Wickersham excused herself when she came in and Anne was left alone with her cousin.

"She hardly spoke to me," whispered Sydney as they continued on their way to their rooms. Her eyes were full of tears.

"Well, what of it? Don't forget what you made up your mind about last night. Just don't care." Elsie's tone as she gave these orders was severe.

But it is easier for some people to resist from "caring" than it is for others. While Sydney's common sense told her that Elsie's advice was excellent, her warm and loving nature suffered keenly. However she hastily dried her eyes before many tears had had time to gather, and went to

her room. Fortunately Bertha Macy was not there. She was so occupied with her preparations for the evening and with her thoughts about Anne that she did not notice the changed aspect of the room until she was about to leave it. Then she suddenly discovered that it looked different. The other table was empty and so was the bureau which had been Bertha's. Her pictures and books were gone. In fact there was nothing to be seen which belonged to Bertha. What could it mean? Sydney scarcely dared hope that Bertha had been given another room, but it certainly seemed so. She went out into the corridor, carrying the box in which she had packed her dress, and met Elsie, who was also laden with a box.

"Good!" exclaimed Elsie. "You must be glad, and so am I."

"What about?"

"Why, haven't you heard? Bertha Macy has been moved to Julia Clark's room."

"And where is Julia's roommate going?"

"She hasn't any. The girl who was there, Mary Allen, has gone home and isn't coming back. You know she hasn't been well and they suddenly decided to take her out of school. I believe they have been thinking about it, but Mary herself didn't know it until yesterday, and she left just after dinner. The Miss Wickershams are worried

for fear she was blocked up in the storm. Bertha asked right away if she could be moved to Julia's room, and Miss Wickersham said she could."

"She would let Bertha do anything," said Sydney. "Well, I am glad. And do you suppose I shall have a room all to myself now?"

"I don't know," said Elsie. She had hoped that Sydney would wish her to come to it. Evidently this idea did not occur to her. Certainly Elsie would not suggest it herself.

There was no time for further conversation for Mrs. Tracy was waiting for them. When they entered the parlor Anne immediately rose.

"Good-bye, Cousin Gertrude," she said. "We will be there in good time for supper. We are going to have a sleigh from the livery stable to take us and come for us."

"I am sorry you will not go this afternoon," said Mrs. Tracy. Her face was graver than usual, and her voice was not very cordial. She was evidently displeased about something.

"Oh, you have plenty without me," said Anne lightly, "but it was good of you to ask me."

She left the room.

"Mrs. Tracy," said Sydney impulsively, "I suppose Anne is not going sleighing because I am. I don't know for certain what all the trouble is, but Anne is very angry with me about something

and I think it is something which I can't very well explain. But she ought to be the one to go with you and not I, for she is your cousin. Now do take her and let me stay at home. Please do ! ”

“ I shall not do anything of the kind,” said Mrs. Tracy. “ You and Elsie are already my guests and I am delighted to have you. I wanted Anne too ; if she chooses to stay at home she has a perfect right to do so, but I shall certainly not urge her to come. Don't think anything more about it, Sydney. I suppose it is a girls' quarrel of some sort, and it will all be smoothed over in time. Don't worry. If you can tell me your side of it perhaps I can straighten the matter out. When we get home there may be a chance for us to talk, but now we must go, for the boys will think we are never coming.”

They were received by the boys with loud exclamations of reproach.

“ We thought Wicky must have gobbled you up for her Thanksgiving dinner,” said Alec, very audibly.

“ My dear boy ! She will hear you,” remonstrated his mother.

“ But where is Anne ? ” he demanded.

“ She can't come sleighing, but she will be with us to-night.”

“ Can't come sleighing ! I wonder what's in the

wind. I never knew Anne to decline a sleigh ride before."

And Anne, from an upper window watching the party drive away, was almost sorry that she had not yielded to her cousin's persuasions.

"It is such fun to go with the Tracy boys," she said to herself, "and Fred Merriam too! It is too bad. But of course I couldn't, feeling as I do about Sydney. It would not be right. If she had only owned up to everything I might have forgiven her. But I simply can't have anything to do with a girl who is so awfully dishonorable. It is as much as I can do to go to Cousin Gertrude's to-night, but there will be so many there I shan't have to have anything to do with Sydney. It would be different on a sleigh ride. I might have had to sit next to her. What a great piece of luck it was for those two girls to get caught in the storm yesterday and be rescued by Alec and taken to that house!"

CHAPTER XI

IT must not be supposed that Anne's resentment against Sydney was entirely due to the receipt of the anonymous letters. There had been other forces at work, and new developments had taken place. Since Sydney and Elsie went out to walk the day before there had been ample time for much gossip and for any amount of mischief to grow and flourish. The girls had all been kept in the house by the storm. The fact that Bertha Macy had asked to have her room changed because she did not care to share one with Sydney was a piece of news of great interest to every one. Bertha had merely stated to Miss Wickersham that she was so fond of Julia Clark that she would like to room with her, and Miss Wickersham after very little hesitation had granted her request. There was no doubt that Bertha was a favorite with the principal. To the girls she had said very little more, but the tone of voice that one uses makes a deep impression, and the slightest of insinuations can gain the importance of an established fact when the speaker intends to have it so, and the person addressed is looking for evidence of trouble.

"I am so glad to have this chance to change my

room," Bertha had said to a group of girls whom she met in the corridor, when she and Julia were engaged in removing her possessions from one room to another. "Of course I am awfully sorry for poor Mary Allen, though even if she is sick it is not altogether bad luck to have to go home, but it is splendid for me. Oh, if you knew what I have had to go through! Well, I don't believe one of you would have stood it as long as I have. Of course I have felt very sorry for Sydney because she seemed so poor. She is here at half rates, I know for certain. That is exactly the way it is—half rates! She must be positively impecunious." (The girls all thought this a most impressive word and admired Bertha accordingly.) "But when people are poor because somebody has done something dreadful you can't feel so sorry."

It may seem surprising that Bertha Macy had gained such influence while Sydney Stuart so quickly became the object of suspicion and dislike, but such was the case, and it was not an unusual one. Little circumstances and tiny events often seem to produce startling results. Bertha was not unpopular with many of the girls, and she had a warm friend in Julia Clark. Together they were of some importance, and the fact that Bertha was liked by Miss Wickersham added to her standing in the school. The other teachers

did not care for her, but Miss Wickersham's opinions of the girls were always affected by their ability as scholars. Bertha Macy was exceedingly clever at her lessons, as well as in other ways, and therefore Miss Wickersham felt that Bertha was a distinct ornament to her school.

And so all this trouble, taking its rise from a very small beginning, grew and prospered until it became of amazing proportions.

The hour for supper at Mrs. Tracy's on this Thanksgiving night was seven o'clock. When the sleighing party returned it was already dark, and after the cold ride they were glad enough to gather around the big fireplace where great logs were crackling, the bright blaze of which made the room warm and cheerful. By this time Sydney and Elsie felt completely at home, and the cordial and hospitable spirit shown to them by Mrs. Tracy and the boys had the effect of bringing out all that was sweet and attractive in both the girls. They were perfectly unaffected and sincere and therefore made a most favorable impression upon their hostess, who was charmed with them and really glad to have them in the house, and Hugh, Alec and Fred Merriam agreed in pronouncing them the nicest, most natural, and altogether the jolliest girls they had met for a long time. This opinion, pronounced with an air

of finality, and with the knowledge of the world possessed by three Harvard students who considered themselves thoroughly experienced in the ways of girls, would no doubt have been extremely flattering to Sydney and Elsie had they but known it.

After half an hour's chat by the fire they dispersed to prepare for the evening, and they were all ready when at a few minutes before seven the first sleigh drew up at the door. Very soon another and then another came and presently all of the guests had arrived. Besides the girls who were at boarding school, there were two, Frances Dunn and Bessie Hastings, who lived in Kingsbridge and attended the Wickersham School as day-scholars, and who therefore were already acquainted with the other girls. A number of young men who were at home from Harvard or Yale or Williams, friends of the Tracys and who also lived in Kingsbridge, had been bidden, and it was therefore a large and merry party of eighteen which sat down to supper.

And such good things as they had to eat! There were broiled chickens, and oysters, and salad, and waffles, and biscuits, and ice cream, and cake,—in fact everything that everybody liked best and which the boarding-school girls appreciated to the utmost. Sydney had been placed on

the same side of the table with Anne Talbot but at such a distance from her that conversation with her was out of the question, and as Bertha Macy was equally far away on the other side there was no awkwardness. She had determined to forget all unpleasant feeling and to do her very best, on Mrs. Tracy's account, to help make the evening as pleasant as possible.

In the meantime Bertha Macy was enjoying herself thoroughly. To be invited to Mrs. Tracy's Thanksgiving party had seemed to her the summit of all that it was possible to wish for, and she had written a triumphant letter to her sister announcing that at last she had reached the goal of her aspirations.

"Everything is going all right," she wrote. "Anne Talbot evidently wants me for her most intimate friend, for she has asked Mrs. Tracy to have me at her party. The Tracys are the very nicest people in Kingsbridge, and the boys are *perfectly elegant*! They are stunning to look at, and as for Alec, the second one, he is just too handsome for anything, with beautiful light hair and stunning blue eyes. All the girls are crazy about him. And Fred Merriam keeps everybody laughing. He is perfectly fascinating. The idea of that horrid little Sydney Stuart staying in the house, and Elsie Brent, of all people! But per-

haps it is just as well, for Mrs. Tracy will soon find out how common they are and will probably never ask them again. I am going to wear my white *tulle*, and I keep my hair up in papers every minute that I can be in my room and have them under my hat when I am out, as much as possible. It is provoking that I have to take it down at all, but Miss Wickersham does not allow curl papers at meals or lessons."

The result of these plans and this vigilance as to her hair was that Bertha appeared at Mrs. Tracy's looking not unlike a waxen image that one sees in the window of a hairdresser's establishment. In fact, Fred Merriam asked Alec in a solemn whisper if he knew the best place for buying wigs. "You'll soon need one, my boy, for you are daily growing older and some day you will lose your hair and be bald, and the wax doll over there is evidently in the wig business. Ask her."

But Alec hushed him up, and repaid him by introducing him to Bertha as soon as possible.

Her light hair was in ringlets and curls and puffs, her frizzy "bang" standing out like a ruffle all around her face, which would have been pretty had it not been for the peculiarly shrewd expression of her eyes. She was very much overdressed, and in this was in marked contrast to the other girls, but fortunately for her she was perfectly satisfied

with her own appearance, and the stare of curiosity and astonishment which Fred Merriam made little effort to disguise, she took for one of admiration.

Poor Bertha had not had many advantages in the matter of bringing up. Thus far, in her intercourse with the girls at school she had not shown very conspicuously her lack of gentle breeding, but now her thin veneering of good manners could not stand the strain put upon it. A girl among other girls is not so much noticed as a girl among boys. It is then that she proves whether or not she is a lady.

Bertha was blissfully ignorant of the fact that there was no sterner critic of a girl's behavior than the "fascinating" Fred Merriam. He was quite willing to go himself as far as any girl would allow, but he reserved the right of judging her. Both he and Alec were extremely particular in this respect and were equally scathing in their comments to each other. They enjoyed "carrying on," as it was called, with anybody and everybody, but the girls whom they considered their friends must be "nice" in every way.

So Bertha simpered and smiled when Fred was introduced to her, and informed him as promptly as possible that she had long known him by sight and had been simply dying to meet him.

"How awfully kind of you," said Fred, at once assuming his most devoted manner, which he knew how to use to perfection. "If I had only known that, I might have been saved many an hour of despair." His face was intensely solemn and his gray eyes gazed sadly at his victim.

"Really!" she said eagerly. "Have you known me by sight and ——" She paused.

"And wished to meet you? How could anything else be possible, Miss Macy? Could such a striking-looking person as you pass unnoticed? Do I look like a blind man? I ask you now, as friend to friend, do my eyes give you the impression of not seeing *you*?"

Bertha, beneath their gaze, cast down her own eyes and giggled. Not from amusement, for she was lacking in humor, but from pleasure.

"It is funny what a small place the world is," she remarked. She had heard older persons make this statement and it seemed to fit this occasion to a nicety. "People are destined to meet sooner or later and it is brought about so strangely. We both live in New York and have probably met in the street ever so many times, and yet we had to come all the way to Kingsbridge to be actually introduced. Oh, dear me, they are going to play games, aren't they? Don't you hate games?"

"Loathe them."

"Do you suppose we have to play? Couldn't we go sit somewhere else before they ask us?"

"Delighted to, I am sure," replied Merriam. "The stairs are always available."

"Oh, I love sitting on the stairs. Let's do it."

"To hear is to obey. Your wishes are as law to me, Miss Macy."

"Oh, Mr. Merriam! You treat me like a queen," said Bertha, whose head was now quite turned by the attention which she felt must be noticed by every one of the other girls. To hear these speeches from Fred Merriam of all persons! And his manner was so devoted! She rose promptly as she said this.

"And are you not a queen?" said he. "Your name should be Rose, the queen among flowers," he added when they reached the stairs and sat down. "What is your first name?"

"Bertha; I wish you would call me Bertha. Miss Macy is so formal, and I really feel as if I had known you always."

"I should judge so," said Merriam, growing more and more solemn in appearance. Inwardly he was indulging in unrestrained mirth. "Great Scott!" he said to himself. "The girl will swallow anything. And here I am stuck on the stairs with her for the evening unless some one

comes to help me out. But I'll get some fun out of it anyway."

So he continued his "fun" until some time later, when the sounds of revelry from the parlor, which he was missing, became more than he could endure. Then he rose to his feet.

"I must take you back," said he. "I have no right to keep you out here in my dreary company when every one else is laughing."

"Oh, I don't want to go play games," said Bertha. "And as for your being dreary! The idea! You are not at all dreary and I just love talking, and when you meet some one who thinks just as you do about everything——"

"Alec!" exclaimed Fred Merriam, catching a glimpse of his friend's light head as he at that moment peered out of the parlor door. "Alec!"

Alec came forward.

"My dear fellow," said Merriam, clutching the bannisters, "you are just in time! Take Miss Macy into the parlor, will you? One of those attacks I sometimes have—I feel it coming on. Don't worry, Miss Macy. It is not your fault at all. You couldn't help it. I am subject to them. I need air. Alec understands."

Alec surveyed him severely. "Yes, I do understand," said he. "Miss Macy, he will come round all right if we leave him here. He just needs to

be alone. He'll bob up again serenely pretty soon. Anne was just asking where you could be. They are getting up charades."

There was nothing for Bertha to do but go with him.

"Is Mr. Merriam not strong?" she asked. "Poor fellow, it seems dreadful to leave him alone if he is ill, or faint, or anything."

"It is just an attack of weakness," explained Alec; "extreme weakness. The only thing to do is to leave him alone."

And Fred, left alone, rolled on the stairs in the ecstasy of his mirth. A little later he entered the parlor. He walked slowly and his face was grave. One quick glance showed him where Bertha was, and he turned the other way and took a seat by Elsie Brent. There were to be some impromptu charades, and all were waiting for the folding doors between the rooms to be opened on the first scene.

Fred, after a remark of no importance, was silent. He was pondering something which Bertha had said and he planned a test for each of the girls. He intended, he told himself, to find out exactly what each of those Wickersham girls was like.

"I have been talking a long time with Miss Macy," said he, by way of opening his campaign. "Charming creature!"

Elsie looked at him and laughed. She already understood precisely what his air of solemnity and his extravagant language meant.

"Don't you agree with me?" he asked. "Why do you laugh?"

"Because you are so amusing."

"But isn't she charming?"

"Why, of course. I told you she was Miss Wickersham's favorite."

"But is she a favorite of yours?"

"I have another favorite. You cannot have more than one."

"I know they are rare, but sometimes you can have two. I suppose yours is Miss Stuart."

"A good guess," said Elsie, laughing again. She had an unaffected hearty laugh that was pleasant to hear. Then she changed the subject. She would not discuss Bertha Macy with him.

A little later he sauntered over to Sydney Stuart. "I have been talking for ever so long with a friend of yours," said he.

"You mean Elsie?"

"No, not Miss Elsie. I mean Miss Macy."

"Oh, *she* isn't a friend of mine!" began Sydney impulsively. "At least—that is——"

"Why, you astonish me! Aren't all the girls at the Wicky School friends?"

"We ought to be," said Sydney, quickly re-

covering herself. "Bertha is a very bright girl at lessons. She is a perfect wonder in mathematics."

"Mathematicians are always charming," observed Merriam.

"I have no doubt they are," said Sydney demurely. "As for myself, I don't know how to add, so of course I admire Bertha Macy for the way she does it. I suppose you and she have been discussing geometrical problems."

"Of course. And we have also dabbled in arithmetic. She has been explaining to me that two and two make four."

"How interesting! Now I couldn't possibly have told you that."

"It is too bad you don't like her, Miss Stuart. Birds in their little nests should always agree."

"Why, I have never said I didn't like her! She is considered very pretty and very clever. If Bertha and I were birds and lived in a nest instead of a boarding school I am sure we should agree beautifully."

"Unless she happened to be an English sparrow and you were a—well, we will say a blue bird."

"I am more like a sparrow," said Sydney laughing as she glanced at her dress. "Bertha is a ——"

"Peacock," whispered Fred.

"Oh, no, not at all. I was going to say, a gay beautiful Baltimore oreole."

"Well, that will do. They are forever chattering."

Sydney looked him straight in the eyes. Her own were reproving. "Do you think you are nice to make fun of her to me? For you are making fun of her. I would rather you didn't."

Fred's expression changed instantly. "I beg your pardon," he said. "You are right." And presently they were talking gaily about other things, and then the doors opened upon the first scene of the charade.

"I just tell you what it is," said he later to Alec and Hugh, when the guests had gone, the household was supposedly asleep, and the three boys in the "den" up-stairs were talking things over. "Those two girls who are staying here are the real thing. I couldn't get them to say a word against the Macy girl. She had been hammering against them for all she was worth. She told me the greatest lot of trash. Said all sorts of mean things about Sydney Stuart, and her family and her affairs. I won't repeat them. It takes a girl to say mean things about another girl. That is just why I tried to draw out the other two to see whether they were anything like the same kind."

"You might have spared yourself the trouble,"

said Alec. "You might have known they are ladies."

"Well, of course I knew that, but even ladies sometimes say disagreeable things when there is any fuss going on, and that there is some kind of fuss I'm sure. But they both kept as quiet as mice on the subject. Oh, that Macy! She really thought I meant it when I called her a queen among flowers! And on the strength of it asked me to call her by her first name! She's a daisy!"

"I never knew the daisy was a queen among flowers," observed Hugh, pensively. "What, may I ask, does she call you? Is it already Freddie?"

"No, but it might have been if I hadn't been firm. Oh, my eye! my little, little eye! She's a daisy!"

And again he had one of his attacks of "weakness," in which the others joined.

CHAPTER XII

SCHOOL life seemed very humdrum to Sydney and Elsie after their visit to Mrs. Tracy's, but the change had been good for Sydney. She no longer took such a gloomy view of the situation. She felt that she had made friends at Kingsbridge, if not in the school itself. Mrs. Tracy said a few words to her when they were alone together for a moment just before her return which had been peculiarly comforting.

"My dear," said the older woman, "I have enjoyed your visit. You must tell your mother from me that I hope to make her acquaintance some day. And in the meantime, Sydney, if you need my advice, or any help from me of any kind, I should be so glad to do anything that I could. With your mother so far away you might wish to talk with an older friend—older in years, I mean—than those at school. Perhaps I could help you more than one of the teachers could. Just come to me whenever you want to. And don't worry about any trouble with Anne. I know my young cousin very well. She goes to great extremes and will certainly come around in time and do every-

thing to atone for her coldness now. Just wait patiently. I will give you a verse to remember.

“ ‘When friendship wields the sword, lay bare the breast
and wait.

Love conquers love, but hate has never conquered
hate.’ ”

So Sydney went back with renewed courage and tried not to allow herself to be affected by Anne's chilling manner, and the less disguised hostility of many of the other girls.

Before many weeks came the Christmas holidays. To her great disappointment and grief Sydney found that it would not be possible for her to go home. Mrs. Stuart felt that she could not afford to let her take the expensive journey, much as she herself longed to see her daughter. There was no help for it, and Sydney was forced to make up her mind to stay where she was and to see all of her schoolmates pack their trunks with joyful eagerness and prepare to go to their homes to pass the holidays. It was hard, as every girl will agree. Not only must she listen to their plans and projects for fun, their ardent anticipations of Christmas, but she also had to endure their ill-concealed surprise that she was to remain there, and her certainty of their criticisms. She heard Julia Clark say one day, “She must have a very queer mother not to let her

come home to spend Christmas. The whole family must be queer. There is something ——” and then Julia broke off with exaggerated caution when she discovered, or appeared to discover, that Sydney was within hearing. Sydney was quite sure however that Julia knew it when she began to speak.

On the whole it was a relief when the barge, now on runners, carrying the travelers, at last started for the station and she was left alone with the three Misses Wickersham to pass the ten days of vacation as best she might. It was the Saturday before Christmas, which fell on a Tuesday this year, and the pupils were not to return until the second of January. Mrs. Tracy and her family had gone to spend Christmas with some of their relatives who lived in Boston, and there was no one outside of the school to whom Sydney could turn. She felt very lonely and very miserable, and having watched the barge drive away amid the jingling of sleigh bells and the joyful shouts of the girls, she went to her room, locked the door and threw herself on the bed, and indulged in what is known as “a good cry.” When she had cried until her eyes were smarting and her head ached and there were no tears left to shed, she told herself that she might be better employed, and by way of finding something more desirable to do she got up and went to the window.

Now it happened—to use a common expression, but little things that lead to great ones can scarcely be attributed to chance—it happened that just as Sydney reached the window, and red-eyed and teary gazed idly down into the Braithwaite garden next door, just at that moment the little lady who lived there came into sight among the trees. The garden paths had been shoveled out and she was in the habit of taking daily exercise there. Always before this she had been under the care of the elderly maid, who attended her closely. It was said among the girls that she was blind, and that this was the reason she was always seen leaning on the maid's arm. Certainly she had never walked there alone before. Sydney watched her at first with languid curiosity, and presently with more marked interest. The Little Lady, as she was called, was evidently in difficulty. She seemed to be confused, and after having at first walked with the aid of her cane in the middle of the broad path, was now wandering from side to side. She stepped into the deep snow, and then hastily turning, found herself in a worse predicament on the other side of the path. In a moment she had fallen. Sydney, whose anxiety about her neighbor's movements had been rapidly increasing, now turned from the window with an exclamation of dismay and hurried from the room. She ran

quickly down-stairs and out into the garden. Remembering the corner of the wall where she had climbed over once before, she waded and plunged through the snow until she reached it, and very soon she was on the other side and making her way to the spot where she had seen the Little Lady fall. She found her still on the ground.

"Is that you, Eliza?" murmured the blind woman. "I could not wait for you and came out alone, and I have fallen, Eliza. You see I am quite in the snow."

"Can I help you?" asked Sydney.

"What! It is not Eliza? It is a younger voice, I am sure. If you would be so good!" The lady stretched out her hands with the long delicate fingers which Sydney could feel even through the woollen gloves, and presently she was standing while Sydney brushed the snow from her skirts and even from her shoulders. She wore the scarlet cape and hood which could be so plainly seen from the schoolhouse windows and which Sydney had so often watched.

"I hope you are not hurt," said the girl. "The snow is very soft here, but the fall must have jarred you."

"Only a little. I was frightened, that is all," said Mrs. Braithwaite; "you are very kind to help me. Where did you come from? Did you drop

from the skies in time to pick up a poor blind woman?"

Sydney laughed. "I am at the school next door, and I was just looking out of my window. I saw you fall, so I ran down and climbed over the wall. May I help you back to the house?"

"If you will be so good. I needed fresh air so badly and Eliza was so long in coming back from the town."

"I hope you are not hurt in any way," said Sydney, looking down at the little figure beside her, as they walked slowly towards the house.

"Oh, no. I was a little startled, that is all, and cold, for I could not get up. That is, I was afraid to rise lest I might do myself some harm among the trees and bushes. Eliza will scold me," she added apprehensively. "She will not like it at all. I wonder—now perhaps you will do me another kindness? Or is it asking too much?"

"I should love to do anything," said Sydney, growing every moment more interested in and more fascinated by the strange little blind woman. "What would you like?"

"Why, my dear, it is for you to take me back to the house, and up-stairs and my things off before Eliza comes back! Then she won't scold. Indeed, she need never know I have been out

without her. And Eliza can be so severe! A good creature, Eliza is. Kind as possible, but at times a trifle severe."

So they walked along the path to the front of the house, and then for the second time in her life Sydney opened the front door of Braithwaite Hall and went in, this time with its owner leaning on her arm.

"We will go right up-stairs," said the Little Lady. "I do not need your assistance now, though it is pleasant to have such a strong young arm to lean upon. My dear boy's arm was strong and firm. I like the young. Ah, yes. It is good to be young, and if we can no longer be that ourselves, to have the young near us. And since my dear boy was taken from me I have had no one. Eliza is a good creature, but old! So old!"

While she talked she stepped briskly through the hall and mounted the stairs, Sydney following. She led the way to the large beautiful room where the piano was, and threw open the door.

"Do you care for music?" she asked in a strange abrupt way. "Tell me the exact truth. Does music speak to your soul?"

"I—I scarcely know," stammered Sydney. "I have heard you play and I loved it."

"Ah! You have heard me play? But why do

you not know if it speaks to your soul? Here, let me touch your face."

She passed her hand gently over the girl's face. "You are too young. That is it. You have not yet learned. It is good to be young, and to be with the young, but only those who have lived can understand what music is. Here! Take my hood and cloak and kindly lay them in that chest of drawers beside the window over there. The hood in the second drawer, the cloak in the third. Folded so." She deftly smoothed the red cloak. "Now Eliza will never guess that I have been out. And now I will play for you."

Sydney did as she was told. Mrs. Braithwaite seated herself at the piano and after a few preliminary chords she passed into a quaint simple air in a peculiar *tempo*.

"Do you like that?" she asked. "Tell me the truth. Does it appeal to you?"

"I love it," said Sydney in a low voice. She stood by the piano.

"Then I shall love you!" said the musician. "It is a Christmas carol, a very old carol, and I always played it for my dear boy. He loved it. This is the beautiful Christmas time and I no longer have my boy, but I can play the music he cared for. Some day I will tell you all about him. You will come again to see me?"

"Indeed I will, if you want me. I am sure Miss Wickersham will allow me to if you really would like it."

"I should, and I think Eliza won't mind. We will speak of it when she comes in. I have heard you all in there. I have listened to your young voices. Ah, it is good to hear the young. I like boys the best, but you are a nice girl I am sure. Now, I will play some more."

And Sydney listened entranced while the wonderful music filled the room, called forth by the slim delicate fingers of the Little Lady of Braithwaite Hall.

Presently the music ceased with a suddenness that was startling. In the distance could be heard approaching a heavy footstep.

"Eliza is coming!" said Mrs. Braithwaite in a low voice. "You needn't mind her. She is a good soul, Eliza is, but so old, and a trifle severe."

The footsteps drew nearer, and in a moment Eliza entered the room. She was the woman whom Sydney had so often seen in the garden with Mrs. Braithwaite. A thick-set elderly woman of middle height, with a pale square face, the lower part of which gave the effect of harshness, but her eyes were kind. She had removed her outdoor garments and wore a large white apron over her dark dress. Her hair was not gray but she was no

longer young. She looked at Sydney with undisguised surprise.

"Eliza," began Mrs. Braithwaite eagerly, "this young lady is calling on me. I don't know your name, my dear, but you shall tell me the next time you come. For I want her to come again, Eliza. She likes music, and you are so often busy, Eliza. It will give you more time for your cleaning and cooking."

Eliza said nothing, but she nodded her head slightly in response to the introduction and surveyed Sydney from head to foot with a critical gaze.

"I will come again with pleasure," said the girl, "if Miss Wickersham is willing, and I am sure she will be. All the other girls have gone home for the holidays but I—couldn't. I have had to stay here. I must go now, or the Miss Wickershams will wonder what has become of me. My name is Sydney Stuart."

Her eyes as she said this chanced to be resting upon Eliza. The woman was looking at her mistress. Her face changed suddenly and she started forward as if to catch Mrs. Braithwaite in her arms. Sydney turned quickly and looked at the Little Lady. She had grown very pale, and certainly her face too had undergone some indescribable change.

"What name did you say?" she faltered.

"Could I have heard aright? Or did my ears deceive me?"

"Sydney Stuart," repeated the girl, wondering at the strange effect of her words.

"And where do you live?"

"In New York. In the city of New York, I mean."

"Ah! Then it is just a coincidence. The name of Stuart has peculiar associations in my mind. Good-bye, my dear. Come again. I shall call you by your first name. Eliza, his name was Stuart, you remember. I will lie down now. I won't go out again."

"Again! You haven't been out of doors to-day, ma'am. We will go this afternoon. I am too busy this morning."

"Very well, Eliza, this afternoon." She turned her sightless eyes towards Sydney and a gleam of amusement passed over her delicate face. "Thank you, my dear, for your kindness to me. Good-morning."

Sydney went down-stairs and left the house. She returned to the school by way of the road. Her mind was absorbed by this remarkable adventure, as she called it. She determined to tell Miss Wickersham all about it as soon as possible, and ask permission to go very soon again to see their mysterious neighbor. The probability of

Eliza's disapproval was the only obstacle to her going there as often as she wished, she thought. Eliza was certainly "severe." She forgot her loneliness and her troubles in her new interest.

Naturally enough, as she was the only girl left at the school, she was thrown into more intimate companionship with the Misses Wickersham. It would have been impossible for Miss Wickersham herself to be "intimate" with any one, but Miss Abby and Miss Jennie were more genial. They were greatly interested in her account of the rescue of Mrs. Braithwaite from the snow-drifts, and willingly consented to Sydney's proposition that she should go in to see their neighbor again.

"I shall go myself," said Miss Wickersham. "During the holidays I shall have time for it. I have been intending to call ever since she came. It is said in Kingsbridge that Mrs. Braithwaite had a very great sorrow. I believe her favorite grand-son died very suddenly, in some tragic way. She could not bear to live on where she had been living, and determined to come to the old Braithwaite place, which has been in her husband's family for generations. They have not occupied it for twenty-five years. She is said to be a little peculiar and entirely ruled by her maid, the Eliza you speak of, I suppose. I shall go in there immediately

after Christmas, and one of you shall go with me," she added, turning to her sisters.

Sydney privately wondered if Mrs. Braithwaite would welcome a call from her neighbor, whose somewhat chilling manner, and stately precision of speech were so unlike the Little Lady's own impulsive ways. Mrs. Braithwaite, in spite of her years and her blindness, seemed like a warm-hearted eager girl.

The next excitement was the arrival by express of a big box which undoubtedly contained presents from home. This was of course not to be opened yet, but Sydney felt it and shook it over and over again, and had almost as much pleasure in guessing its contents as she did when she really looked at them on Christmas morning. In addition to her home gifts she found to her delight that some of the girls had left little presents for her. There was a book from Dorothy Fearing, a pretty pincushion which Ruth Carter had made for her, and from Elsie a box of her favorite caramels and a dainty necktie. Even one or two of the other girls who had appeared to be less friendly of late had left Christmas cards for their fellow schoolmate, whose Christmas was to be so much less merry than their own.

From Anne Talbot there was nothing. Dolly had begged her to give Sydney some little re-

membrance, even if it were only a card or a calendar, but she would not.

"I am not going to," said Anne. "She has had lots of chances to explain things, and she won't. I was getting awfully fond of her, and I am very much disappointed in her. And now she acts so 'goody-goody.' If she would fire up and have a scrimmage I believe I should like her better, but she is just pleasant all the time and yet looks awfully hurt. It is so maddening. No, Dolly, you needn't say another word. I simply *won't.*"

For Anne Talbot there was no point of view but her own. She had not yet discovered that there are many ways of looking at the same subject.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN Anne Talbot reached New York that Saturday evening before Christmas her mother was waiting for her at the station, and with hasty good-byes to the other girls she followed her to the carriage and they were soon being driven to the beautiful house on Fifth Avenue where the Talbots lived.

"You dear, dearest mother!" exclaimed Anne, throwing her arms about Mrs. Talbot and kissing her. "I never was so glad to see anybody in my life. How can you be so hard-hearted as to make me languish in boarding-school?"

"You don't look very languishing," laughed Mrs. Talbot. "So far as I can tell in this light you are in a very bouncing state of health. Kingsbridge seems to agree with you in spite of the plain fare you tell me about. You mustn't forget, my dear, that I, too, went to the Wicker-sham School. I know you are not being starved, as you would have me believe."

"Wicky doesn't improve with age. I dare say that twenty-five years ago she gave you terrapin

l canvas-back ducks, but she doesn't now, my
d little mother. No, indeedy! Nothing but
n and corned beef, and a few other horrors, and
cream only three times since school opened. I
pe you are going to give me ice cream for break-
t, lunch and dinner, and it must be Maillard's,
ase. And don't forget I am very fond of buck-
eat cakes, and have cream cakes always ready
the pantry."

'Anne! Does your mind run on nothing but
ing? Is that all you have learned to talk
out?"

'Well, it is all because Wicky starves us. Oh,
w glad I am to be back in noisy old New York.
d what about the party, mamma? I have
ed a lot of girls already and am to let them
ow which night the minute I can. Don't you
nk it would be great to have it New Year's Eve
l sit up to see the old year out? And oh,
mma dear, did Bud bring home anybody for
holidays? I am simply wild to know."

'Bud" was Anne's name for her only brother
ward, by which she had called him ever since
days when she could not "talk plain" and
ed "Buddie" instead of "brother." She now
rd to her satisfaction that two young men were
iting in the house and that one of them was
d Merriam, Alec Tracy's friend, and that Alec

himself was coming in a few days. They were classmates of Ned's at Harvard and were all intimate. The other guest was Will Dana, whose home was in Baltimore.

Any girl can easily imagine what fun was in store for Anne during these Christmas holidays. Her father and mother, delighted to have her at home, were ready to grant her every indulgence that was in their power to bestow. Her brother, a few years older than herself, had always been especially devoted to her, his friends liked her and were ready to do her bidding. She was pretty and high-spirited, full of fun, and although inclined to be obstinate when her "mind was made up," as we have already discovered, she was of a generous nature, and if once convinced that she was in the wrong was always perfectly willing to acknowledge it. The difficulty lay in convincing her. Just now she forgot all about Sydney Stuart and the affairs of school, which so lately had been of such importance, and was entirely absorbed in her preparations for Christmas and the good times that lay beyond that day. She never thought of Sydney alone in Kingsbridge, whose affection for her was unabated in spite of Anne's coldness, and who longed with all her sensitive, intense temperament to have her once more for a friend. It is so hard to *wait* when you have an eager, impulsive

heart! But Mrs. Tracy had advised her to wait and she was honestly striving to be patient.

On Christmas Eve the Talbot family of course hung up their stockings. They not only hung them up but they filled them. That is, they provided the contents for one another's, and this gave a grand opportunity for all sorts of jokes to be played. As soon as dinner was over, each member of the party went to his or her room, and carefully placed a stocking, distinctly marked with its owner's name, by the fireplace, where Santa Claus would have no difficulty in finding it when he should emerge from the chimney. This accomplished, they all returned to the library, and if when they went to bed their stockings had disappeared from the fireplaces they made no comment. Santa Claus had arrived earlier than was expected, that was all. And down-stairs, Mr. and Mrs. Talbot filled the stockings with all sorts of odd-looking packages which had been collected and marked, and after the household was presumably asleep, again hung them where they had been left early in the evening, now stuffed into grotesque shape and fairly bursting with their extraordinary contents.

Christmas morning these were examined as early as each recipient chose to wake up and do it, and loud were the shouts of laughter which came from

every room. After breakfast the whole family marched into the parlor, the doors of which had been kept carefully closed, and here were arranged a number of tables, covered with white cloths and bearing the gifts which had been pouring into the house for many days and which were now to be opened.

Anne's pleasure and enthusiasm reached their height when she found among her presents a charming little gold watch and chain from her father and mother, and from her brother a ring which she declared was the prettiest in New York. It was a band of gold set with turquoises and inside were engraved the words, "Nan from Bud. Christmas, 1880." She had never worn rings before, and as he slipped it on her finger she gave him a hearty hug.

"You dear old boy," she whispered. "Did you choose it yourself?"

"Of course I did!"

"I shall never wear any other ring as long as I live."

"Bosh! Are you going to decline an engagement ring?"

"I shall decline an engagement. I'm not going to marry, even if I'm asked, which is doubtful. I am going to keep house for you and be the comfort of your declining years."



"I SHALL NEVER WEAR ANY OTHER RING"



"My dear girl!" exclaimed Ned, in pretended dismay. "Perhaps I shall have provided myself with other comforts! Don't let your satisfaction in the ring lead you to make rash vows of remaining in single blessedness for *my* poor sake!"

"Wretch! You don't want me! Well, Bud, I hope I shall like her. If I don't——"

"If you don't, you will have to hate her. I know you, Nan. However, cheer up. I haven't made my final choice as yet."

"Cheer up! cheer up! The worst is yet to come!" quoted Fred Merriam. "Anne, I haven't thanked you. You have been so engrossed with your presents and Ned's future housekeeping I haven't had a chance. That crimson sofa pillow is a dandy. It is just what my room needs. I shan't let Alec rest *his* golden locks upon it, you may be dead sure of that. That's the worst of a roommate. They always grab all of a fellow's best cushions. Thanks ever so much."

"And thank you, Freddy, for your perfect basket. You know my weakness for Maillard's candy. You must have broken yourself in two getting me five pounds and such a basket as that. I shall always use it for a work-basket."

"What a picture!" murmured Fred. "Anne darning stockings, my basket beside her——"

"Your candies following one another with fear-

ful rapidity down her yawning throat," put in Ned.

"Bud! How disgusting. It sounds as though I were a young robin. But here is a package I haven't opened. Whom can it be from? It looks like Bertha Macy's handwriting, but I hope it isn't, for I haven't sent her anything. I never thought of her."

She untied the ribbon and removed the wrapper. In it was a box, and in the box, laid in jeweler's cotton, was a shining bangle. Anne looked at it in astonishment. Then she discovered a card.

"It is from Bertha!" she exclaimed. "It is a perfect beauty. I had no idea she was going to send me anything. It is from Tiffany's, too. She must have spent a lot on it. I wish she hadn't, for I don't think they have so very much money. Oh, I wish I had thought to send her something!"

"The spirit of Christmas!" observed Fred. "To her that gives should be given!"

"Well, it is true. I could still send her flowers or candy. I might fill a box from your basket, just to punish you. Oh! and make you take them there! I will."

"Why don't you send her the basket just as it is?" inquired Fred.

"Because I need it for my stockings. For no

other reason of course. I will get a basket. I have a nice little new one."

She did so, and poured in the Maillard chocolates with a ruthless and an unstinting hand.

"If you hadn't made fun of my darning stockings I shouldn't have taken your candy for this," said she. "Now I will do it up, and will you please get ready and take it as soon as you can. She lives in Thirty-seventh Street. I will write the address."

"Let Banks or one of the maids take it, Anne," said her mother. "Don't make Fred go away down to Thirty-seventh Street. No, Fred, you shall not do it."

"Oh, mamma, it would add ten times to Bertha's pleasure if Fred were to leave it there. She would be sure to see him, and she admires him as much as he does her."

Fred groaned.

"No, he is not to go. Besides, he would not have time before church. And I don't like this idea of sending her something just because she sent something to you. You ought to have thought of it before."

"Well, I didn't, and indeed, mamma, she will like it, and be awfully hurt if she doesn't get anything from me. And it is such a beautiful bangle"

Mrs. Talbot examined it. Then she looked at the box.

"I haven't heard you speak of her often. Is she a great friend of yours?" she asked.

"Oh, sort of a great friend. That is, lately I have seen more of her. She was at Cousin Gertrude's Thanksgiving party. I asked her, for Cousin Gertrude said I might bring some of the girls."

"She was a dandy choice!" murmured Fred.

I shall not soon forget my evening on the stairs with the Fair One with the Flaxen Locks!"

"Oh, boys are so queer, mamma. You know they don't think the way we girls do about other girls. Fred got stuck with Bertha and so he has taken an awful prejudice against her, and so did Alec."

Fred was about to make some retort, but he must have remembered in time that it was not in particularly good taste for him to criticise so freely a girl who was apparently Anne's friend, for having opened his mouth to speak he closed it again and placed his hand upon it with exaggerated caution, merely allowing himself to exchange a glance with Ned that was full of meaning.

In the meantime Ned had been examining the bangle. He laid it back in the cotton without comment. A little later when he and Fred were

together in another part of the room he whispered :
"Imitation! Tiffany box!"

"Quite emblematic of the giver," replied his friend. "Wait till you see her."

"What does Anne mean by standing up for her? Anne is usually pretty keen that way."

"Oh, the best of us are influenced by undisguised admiration, my dear boy. See the result of your admiration of me. I cannot live without you."

"Precisely," returned Ned, dryly. "But I'm glad it doesn't lead you into giving me tin presents in Tiffany boxes. I say, Nan!"

"Hush up, Neddy. Let her find out things herself. I'll trust Anne any day to come to her senses. Just give her time. And you know the more you oppose her the longer she will be in coming round."

Which remark proved Fred Merriam to be a wise young man, and Ned, realizing his friend's sagacity, turned the conversation and spoke to Anne about something else when she responded to his summons.

So a pretty basket, filled with Fred's chocolates, was sent to Bertha and gave her great delight, which was marred only by the suspicion that Anne had not intended to give her anything until reminded of it by her own gift. She did not allow

this to worry her, however, and determined instead of writing her a note of thanks to call at the Talbots' the next day. In this way there might be an opportunity for her to meet Anne's Harvard brother, and also it might occur to Anne to invite her to her party, which she knew was to take place during the holidays and to which as yet she had not been bidden. Anne had spoken of it as being very small, which, while it accounted for Bertha's having no invitation, made her all the more desirous of being included among the favored ones.

Bertha Macy had friends of her own, and might have been happy among them had she not been so carried away by her ambition to be counted among Anne Talbot's intimate friends. She spoke of herself as one of them to her own admiring circle, and she was willing to go to any length to procure herself an invitation to the house. Mr. Edward Talbot was one of the leading men of New York, and was well-known in every quarter for his business ability, his wealth and his benevolence. Mrs. Talbot was admired for her beauty and her kindness of heart, but she was also said to be "very exclusive." There was little that the Macys did not know, or think they knew, about New York social life, and they were keenly alive to the worldly advantages of being on intimate terms with the Talbots. Therefore, the day after Christmas, Bertha

donned her best clothes and at an early hour set forth to call upon her schoolmate.

The carriage was waiting in front of the house, and it is to be feared that Bertha's frivolous little mind was more deeply impressed than ever by the sight of the handsome horses, the stately coachman in livery on the box, and the groom who stood at the carriage door. She told herself that she had come at precisely the right moment. No doubt Anne was going out in the carriage and might perhaps ask her to accompany her. She tripped up the steps and rang the bell, trying hard not to show her eagerness but to act as though she had been sounding the Talbots' door bell every day for years. At the very moment that she did so the door was opened by the man, and Mrs. Talbot and Anne came out.

"Oh, Bertha!" exclaimed Anne. "I am so glad to see you, but awfully sorry too, for I am just going out with mamma. Mamma, this is Bertha Macy. She is at school, you know."

Mrs. Talbot shook hands with her cordially, and no one would have suspected that she was surveying somewhat critically the girl whom she had heard discussed and of whom she was inclined, by what she had heard and seen, to disapprove. Mrs. Talbot would not have objected to an imitation bangle, perhaps, but she did not like imitation ban-

gles sent in Tiffany boxes. However, there was nothing in Bertha's appearance this morning to arouse adverse criticism. She was prettily and inconspicuously dressed in a suit of dark blue, and her large blue felt hat with ostrich feathers looked very well over her fair hair.

"I am so sorry I can't stay at home and see you," continued Anne, "but mamma has made an engagement for me at the dressmaker's and we are late now, and afterward we have to do some shopping together. But do come to see me again, Bertha. I want you to see my Christmas presents. That was a lovely bangle you sent me. I was going to write and thank you, but now I can tell you."

"And that was a perfect basket of candy you sent me!" exclaimed Bertha. "I simply couldn't write to you. I just had to come and thank you for it. How lovely of you to send me anything! But I won't keep you now, as you are going out. You must come and see me, Anne."

"I will if I can, but the holidays are so short, and there are such lots of things to do, and then my brother is at home and some of his friends. If I don't get to see you, you will know it was because I simply couldn't, and we will make up for it when we go back to school."

They were descending the steps as she said this,

and the groom had opened the carriage door. She happened to glance at Bertha, and saw from the expression of her face that she was deeply offended. Anne was as warm-hearted as she was impulsive, so without stopping to give the matter a second thought or to consider what her mother's opinion might be, she hurriedly added: "But I want you to come to my party, Bertha. It is to be New Year's Eve. We will send you a regular invitation, but do keep that evening free, won't you?"

"Indeed I will!" cried Bertha, with undisguised delight. "I should just love to come!"

And then the carriage door was slammed and the Talbots were driven quickly away. Bertha walked down Fifth Avenue in a state of felicity that made her step upon the commonplace flagstones as though she were treading upon air, and with so happy a face that more than one person turned to look at her a second time.

"Didn't I hit it just exactly right!" she said to herself exultingly. "If I had been two minutes later they would have been gone, and I don't believe Anne would have asked me. It would have been awfully mean of her, but I don't think she was going to do it. My! Won't the girls in our set envy me! Just think of my going to a New Year's Eve party at the Talbots', and a small party, too! I'll have a new dress. I certainly

can't go in the one I wore to the Tracys'. I've just got to have a new one."

In the meantime Mrs. Talbot and her daughter were discussing the situation.

"Anne, you know I don't care to have you invite guests to the house without my permission," said she. "It surprised me very much to hear you. You should have left it for me to do."

"Oh, mamma, dear, I know you don't like to have me do it, but I didn't stop to think. You didn't see Bertha's face. She looked so disappointed about my going out, and when I said there was so much on hand to do that I couldn't go to see her. And then she knew about the party and that Dolly and the others are coming. She would have been terribly hurt to be left out, and besides, she was so good to send me that bangle."

Mrs. Talbot was silent for a moment. She had already decided to let Anne find out for herself what Bertha was, or what Mrs. Talbot suspected her to be, and after all she was not sorry that Anne was kind-hearted and ready to be friendly and hospitable to all of her schoolmates, without regard to their position in New York society. So she said no more. She herself was in no way influenced by wealth or social standing. She merely insisted upon good breeding and the genuine worth of those who came to her house. The affair

of the bracelet had proved to her very clearly that these two qualities must be lacking in Bertha. But the girl appeared to be a lady in her manner of speaking and her dress, and after all it could do no possible harm to Anne or to any one for her to be present on New Year's Eve.

CHAPTER XIV

IT was the last night of the old year. The weather had been raw and cloudy all day, and shortly before six o'clock the rain began to fall and the streets were now wet and dreary. One would not have suspected this, however, to judge by the gay scene within the Talbots' doors. A merry party of young people sat down to dinner at seven o'clock. A cousin of Anne who was also a cousin of Will Dana and who, like him, lived in Baltimore, was visiting her. Dolly Fearing was spending the night there, although her home was in New York, but a few blocks away; Alec Tracy had arrived, and with Ned, Fred Merriam, Mr. and Mrs. Talbot and Mrs. Dana, who was Mrs. Talbot's sister, their number was ten. The other guests who were bidden to the party were to come at nine o'clock.

"I did an awfully queer thing, I'm afraid, Mrs. Talbot," said Will Dana. "I hope you will forgive me. Ned told me it was all right, but I ought to have asked you first."

"What is it, Willy?" asked his hostess. "I can't imagine your doing anything I could not forgive, nor indeed anything that required forgiveness."

"Oh, mother! What blarney!" exclaimed Ned, with affected astonishment. "I wish she would say such things to me!" he added, turning to Mollie Dana, the mutual cousin of himself and Will.

"You needn't worry," retorted Mollie. "Aunt Carry can't often be accused of harshness to you, oh, you spoiled one! You indulged darling!"

"Hark, hark! It is the lark!" Mollie is calling me a darling, Aunt Edith. What do you think of that?"

"But tell me what you have done, Willy?" said Mrs. Talbot. "I really am curious to hear."

"I have invited two fellows to come to-night without consulting you. I didn't run across them until just before I came in and there wasn't time to ask you. Fortunately just as I had left them I ran into Neddy, and he said it was all right and followed them up and asked them himself. He knows them too. They are awfully good fellows. Murray used to be in our class, but their father died and left them pretty hard up so he had to give up college and go to work."

"They are the Stuarts," said Ned. "Bob and Murray Stuart. I always liked them. Bob, the oldest one, was a classmate of Hugh's, Alec, you know."

"Yes, of course," said Alec. "I always liked

them too. Murray was quite a chum of ours. I thought they lived in Baltimore."

"So they did, but it seems they have moved to New York."

"I know them, or at least I know the mother and eldest daughter," said Mrs. Dana. "Carry, you know whom I mean. You remember?"

"Oh, yes!" said Mrs. Talbot. "Those poor Stuarts! I am glad you asked the boys to come, Willy. If I had known they were living in New York I should have called on their mother. We might go while you are here, Edith. I shall make a special point of it, for I was always so sorry for her. She has been through so much."

"Yes, it was a fearful experience, and they have taken it harder than many people would. They are a very proud family and abnormally sensitive."

"Did you ever see the younger brother?" asked Ned of Will Dana. "The one who did it?"

"No. I believe he is the most sensitive and proud of the family, and he can't get over it, somebody told me. It has had an awful affect upon him."

"Poor fellow! Well, it was a terrible thing, but I don't see how he could be blamed for it."

"Suppose we don't talk about that now," interposed Mrs. Talbot. "Willy, I am very glad you

asked them to come. Ned, I want you to be especially cordial to them, as I shall be myself. I have the greatest sympathy for them, especially as you say they have lost their father and are left so poorly off."

While this conversation was being carried on Anne had been absorbed in a laughing controversy with her father and Fred Merriam and had heard nothing of it. She was therefore quite ignorant of the fact that two of Sydney Stuart's brothers were coming to the house that evening, and later, when they arrived and were introduced to her by her brother, she merely supposed that they were two of his college friends whom she had not happened to meet before, and whom he had invited without her knowledge. She greeted them with her accustomed cordiality and decided with her usual rapidity that they were very nice-looking and that she liked them. Ned then led them to some of the other girls to be presented and Anne turned to her other guests, who were now nearly all there.

Bertha Macy was among the last to arrive. She had purposely chosen to make a late entrance, for she wished to show the Talbots that she knew the ways of society, and this seemed to her to be an excellent method of proving it. She was very much over-dressed, rigged out in ruffles, flounces and frills, and she wore numerous necklaces and

bracelets which jingled with every movement and which made Fred Merriam compare her to the personage in Mother Goose who "wore rings on her fingers and bells on her toes." Her hair had been elaborately arranged by a professional hair-dresser and the curls and puffs were a "marvel of elegance."

She greeted Mrs. Talbot and Anne with such effusiveness that she attracted the attention of all who happened to be near.

"Anne, this is too perfect!" she exclaimed. "I am so thankful I didn't have anything else on hand for to-night. It might have happened just the other way for there is so much going on in the holidays. I simply couldn't have declined your invitation, though. I should have gotten out of the other somehow, you may be sure of that." She had planned this speech on her way from home. It would stamp her at once as a girl of fashion and many engagements, she thought. "And here is Dolly," she continued volubly. "Girls, I am simply dying to tell you the most exciting thing. I don't know what you will say when you hear it. I had a letter to-day from Julia Clark, sixteen pages. You know she is staying with her aunt in Baltimore, and she has heard all about Sydney Stuart. The most awful thing, my dear!"

But Anne had turned away from her to speak to

some one else, and Dolly took the opportunity to introduce Will Dana to Bertha. She had heard enough of the conversation at the dinner table to guess that Julia had written something about the mysterious troubles of the Stuart family which had been alluded to then, and she did not wish Bertha to go into any further particulars on such an occasion as this. Will Dana being conveniently near, she called him up and presented him. Fred Merriam and Alec Tracy were in another part of the room, and Bertha soon found to her chagrin that they made no effort to come and speak to her. But Anne was a good hostess and kept a careful watch upon all her guests. She knew that Bertha was not popular with the boys who had met her at Kingsbridge, but she determined that at her house Bertha should have as good a time as possible, so shortly before supper was announced she asked Ned to see that she had some one to take her in. Ned, who had counted on something quite different, gave up his own plans and gallantly asked Bertha himself, but he tried to soothe his own feelings by arranging that they should sit in a small room that opened from the supper room, where Ruth Carter and Murray Stuart, Mollie Dana and Alec Tracy, Anne and Fred Merriam were also established.

It must be remembered that not one of them

knew that Murray Stuart was the brother of Sydney, and that Alec and Fred, although they had become so well acquainted with her at Thanksgiving, had never heard that she had once lived in Baltimore. Anne had not heard the conversation about the Stuarts which had taken place at the dinner table, and Murray Stuart himself was ignorant of the fact that three of these girls were at the Wickersham School in Kingsbridge. Though Sydney had mentioned Anne Talbot in some of her earlier letters, he had never connected her in his mind with his friends at Harvard, and as Sydney had not referred to her lately he had naturally forgotten that there was a girl at the school by the name of Talbot. Bertha, when he was introduced to her, had not caught his name, and afterward hearing him addressed as "Murray" by the other boys supposed that to be his last name. Even had she known that it was Stuart it is scarcely probable that she would have thought of his possible relationship to Sydney.

The young men had left them for a few minutes in order to bring them their supper, and the four girls were alone, when Bertha again remembered the letter that she had received from Julia Clark that day, and which had made so profound an impression upon her that even the excitement of a

party at the Talbots' had failed to divert her mind from it altogether.

"Anne," she exclaimed, "I must tell you about Julia's letter! You will all be interested, even you, Miss Dana, though you are not at our school, for it is the most awful tale! I never have heard anything quite so frightful, and for my part, I don't think Miss Wickersham ought to have a girl at the school who has such connections as Sydney has."

"Oh, Bertha," began Ruth Carter. "I don't think this is a very good time ——"

"Ruth, do let her tell it," interposed Anne. "This is the second time to-night Bertha has begun to tell me about Julia Clark's letter. I must say I should like to know what was in it."

"I thought you would," said Bertha triumphantly. "Well, it is simply this. She is the sister of a murderer."

"What!" cried the girls. "Bertha! What *do* you mean?"

"Just what I say. Her own brother actually killed somebody."

As she said these words with great emphasis, Murray Stuart entered the room, carrying a plate of salad and oysters in one hand and a cup of chocolate in the other. He started slightly and the chocolate spilled over into the saucer.

"I beg your pardon," he said to Ruth, "I flattered myself I was bringing you this with remarkable care."

Ruth scarcely noticed what he was saying.

"I can't believe it," she said to Bertha. "Julia has gotten it wrong in some way."

"Indeed she hasn't," replied Bertha. "I only wish I had her letter."

By this time Fred, Alec and Ned had come in, but Bertha, carried away by the importance of her news, continued the subject. The other girls listened to her eagerly enough now.

"There is no doubt at all about its being true," said Bertha. "Julia's aunt has always lived in Baltimore and knew about it at the time. Of course she did not know such common people herself. Naturally Julia's aunt would not know people who could be murderers. It is just what I imagined. I always thought she was awfully common, and I knew there was some mystery. Of course, though, it never entered my head to suppose that Sydney Stuart's brother could be a murderer."

There was silence in the little room for an instant. Then Murray Stuart, who had been standing behind Ruth, stepped slightly forward. He motioned to his three friends to be silent. They had all turned eagerly towards him.

"Wait!" said he, very quietly. His face was white and his dark eyes looked straight at Bertha. "You have been misinformed, Miss Macy. I know the family. Miss Sydney Stuart's brother is *not* a murderer. The tragedy that you have heard about was entirely the result of an accident, as every one knew at the time."

Then he turned to Ruth Carter and began to speak of something else, and the other young men plunged eagerly into conversation. Anne was clever enough to know that they had been treading on very dangerous ground and seconded these efforts to get away from it, as did Ruth Carter and Mollie Dana. Bertha scarcely knew what to make of it all. She was very angry with this Mr. Murray, as she still supposed him to be, but there was no way of venting her wrath nor of continuing her tale of scandal for no one would listen to her. They were all laughing immoderately at some joke of Fred Merriam's (in which Bertha failed to find anything at all amusing), and would not pay the slightest attention to her. Ned Talbot, her own supper partner, did nothing further towards entertaining her, beyond bringing her some ice cream. In fact his manner to her had become distinctly hostile, and he devoted himself entirely to Ruth Carter. Bertha had suspected all along that he preferred Ruth's con-

versation to her own and had brought her into this little room in order to be near Ruth, which added largely to her ill humor. She decided in her own mind that a party at the Talbots' was not what she had supposed it would be, and she actually almost wished that she had not come. However, no amount of "snubbing from these snobs" (so she expressed it to herself) would diminish the glory she had acquired in the eyes of her own circle by merely having been bidden to this exclusive house, and her friends should never know what she had suffered there.

She saw Ned Talbot whisper something to Anne, which caused a most peculiar expression to pass over her face. It seemed like a flash of horror followed by indignation. Then Anne whispered something in reply that was short but very emphatic.

"I think they are very rude to whisper that way," thought Bertha. "I am sure it is something about me."

She was becoming rapidly more indignant when Anne, having recovered her self-possession, came and sat down beside her with some polite remark, and then in a moment suggested that as they had finished their supper they should go out into the hall and wait for the old year to die and the New Year to be rung in.

"Come, Alec," said Anne in her imperious fashion. "You don't want any more supper. Let us leave these greedy ones to finish without us."

"That is a pretty way for your hostess to talk," said Ned, laughing. "Don't be frightened. I'll stay with you and see that you have all you want to eat."

The little group soon dispersed, and then Ned had the opportunity that he had been waiting for. He slipped his arm through that of Murray Stuart. "My dear fellow," he whispered, "we wouldn't have had that happen for the world, but there is no reason why you should care. I don't know who that girl is that my sister has picked up at school and asked here, but evidently she is not a person whose opinion would count for anything. We all know the rights of the case and have nothing but sympathy for your brother."

"That's all right, old man," said Murray. "Of course I understand how the girl happened to get it wrong. I am only sorry that such a report should be about after all this time."

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed Ned impatiently. "You may be pretty sure it is just girls' talk. I don't believe anybody thinks such a preposterous thing is true. You know how girls chatter—some girls. And probably this one and her correspond-

ent have some grudge against your sister and this is their charming way of paying her off. Of course this Miss Macy wouldn't have spoken of it to-night if she had known who you are. I will give her that much credit, though I think it was a pretty unsafe business, her speaking of the affair at all in a house where she is a stranger and not knowing how we might be connected with the people she was talking about. It was very nice of you, Murray, not to tell her just who you are."

"Oh, I wouldn't have done that for anything. It would have made everybody feel uncomfortable and as for the poor girl herself——"

"Poor girl!" repeated Ned. And then they were joined by Alec Tracy and Fred Merriam.

"I'm mighty glad to run across you again, Murray," said Alec. "I wish I had known Miss Sydney Stuart was your sister when I met her. She stayed a couple of days with my mother at Thanksgiving, and she's an awfully jolly girl."

"Why, of course she did!" exclaimed Murray. "She wrote home about being rescued by a Mr. Tracy in a snow-storm and staying at his mother's house. She never mentioned your first name or of course I should have known."

"Don't let us lose sight of you again," said Fred Merriam. "What are you doing now, Murray? We have missed you out of the class."

"Thanks, old fellow. It was a hard pull to have to give up, but I had to go to work. I am in a bank down town. You may see me its president some day—and then again you may not!"

They all laughed, and then they walked together into the hall. Mrs. Talbot was talking with Bob Stuart and she beckoned the young men to come to her. "I am perfectly delighted to see you and your brother here," she said to Murray in her charming, cordial way. "I used to know your mother in Baltimore, and my sister Mrs. Dana, who is staying with me now, knew her quite well. We are coming to see her very soon. Will you tell her so, with my love? I did not know until to-night that she was living in New York or I should have called long before this."

"And, mother," said Ned, "it seems that one of Murray's sisters is at the Wickersham School."

"Is she? Oh, I remember! Anne has mentioned her in her letters, I am sure. Now this is all very nice, and I am so glad you could come to-night or we should never have found it all out."

And Murray Stuart, proud and sensitive as all his family were, felt comforted by her cordial friendliness. He knew that she was fully aware of the family history, and also that she could not yet have heard of what had transpired in the

supper room, so it was not in order to make amends for that painful incident that she was showing such kindness to his brother and himself.

And now Anne came towards him. She had disposed of Bertha for the time by introducing some one to her who had not been with them.

"I hope you won't hate us, Mr. Stuart, because such a thing happened at our house," she said, with her usual frank, impulsive heartiness. Her eyes were full of sympathy and kindness. "Of course Miss Macy did not know, and she doesn't yet. I am so surprised to find that Sydney is your sister. We go back to school day after tomorrow, more's the pity! But it will be great fun to tell her that you and your brother were at my New Year's party."

Anne did not yet know the whole story. Ned had only been able to give her the barest facts, but they were sufficient to make her understand that Bertha's tale had been grossly exaggerated. She was very indignant with Bertha for having shown so little sense of what was proper as to tell such a tale on such an occasion, and her wrath with her and her sympathy for the Stuarts, acting upon her excitable temperament, that was so apt to carry her to extremes, made her ready to overlook all of Sydney's supposed shortcomings in the matter of anonymous letters. She longed to get

back to Kingsbridge and tell her so, in spite of her regret at returning to school. As for Bertha! She would soon tell her what she thought of her conduct!

CHAPTER XV

WHILE all this had been taking place in New York, life at Kingsbridge during the holidays had been very uneventful. Christmas Day had been made as pleasant for Sydney as was possible by the Misses Wickersham, but it was perfectly natural for Sydney to feel homesick, and one could not blame her for longing to be with her own family at such a time. She struggled to overcome the feeling, or at least not to show it to any one, and in this she was partially successful. She looked at her presents, and went to church, and ate her turkey as cheerfully as did the others to all appearances, and then in the afternoon she went off for a long walk with Miss Jennie Wickersham, whom of all the teachers she admired and loved the most. The Misses Wickersham, on their part, had grown to understand and like Sydney. Having her alone with them had shown them her charm and her sweet nature in a way that would never have been possible during school time, and quite unknown to herself she had secured a firm place in the good opinion of all the sisters, including Miss Wickersham herself, and that in spite of

the good lady's partiality for excellence in mathematics!

The monotony of the days was varied by an occasional visit to the little lady next door. Mrs. Braithwaite grew to depend upon her coming and it soon became an established habit for Sydney to run in to see her nearly every day. Of course it would not be possible to continue this custom when school began again, but during the holidays the Misses Wickersham were only too glad to have Sydney do it. They were sorry for their blind neighbor and sorry for the young girl herself, who naturally must be very lonely.

And so vacation wore away and at last the second of January came, the day upon which the pupils were to return to Kingsbridge.

The first to arrive were those who lived in the neighborhood of Boston. Elsie Brent was one of these, for her home was in Cambridge. When the sleigh that brought them from the station drew up at the door of the Wickersham School, and the door was opened by Sydney herself, Elsie's heart gave a great thump. She had been longing to see her friend all through the holidays and had been wondering how she was getting on alone. She had wished more than once that she could have asked her to be her guest in Cambridge. Perhaps Sydney could have afforded the shorter journey. But

she had not been able to invite her, and had been forced to content herself with writing frequent letters. Now, although she was so glad to see Sydney again that it seemed as though the whole world had changed, no one would ever have guessed it. She did not offer to kiss her, but held out her hand with an awkward movement, and when Sydney threw her arms about her neck and hugged her, and exclaimed, "Oh, I am so glad you have come back, Elsie!" she merely said, "How are you? Don't strangle me." She was really so touched by this warm greeting that she would have cried if she had said more. The tears were in her eyes, but she turned quickly away that Sydney might not see them. It was real torture to Elsie to know that she was showing emotion, even to her dearest friend.

"I have something to surprise you with," said Sydney. "I don't believe you will ever guess what it is, and I can scarcely wait to tell you. I do hope you will like it."

A wild thought darted through Elsie's mind, but she immediately put it aside as being too wonderful to bear the slightest chance of being true.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Oh, something! I am not going to tell you until you get up-stairs to your own room. You will find it there."

Elsie's heart, which had been beating rapidly in spite of her intention to be calm, subsided again. For a brief instant she had allowed herself to hope that she was to share Sydney's room for the remainder of the year. But if the surprise was awaiting her in "her own room," this could not be it.

"Now," said Sydney, when they had reached the third floor, "I am going to blindfold you. Here is a big handkerchief all ready." She shook out a silk handkerchief and then folded it and tied it around Elsie's head, under her hat.

"What's up?" asked one of the girls who also had just arrived. "Blind man's buff?"

"Not quite. A surprise for Elsie. Now I'll turn you around three times and lead you to your room, and then I'll take off the handkerchief and you'll see it."

She did this, and Elsie was led along the corridor, followed by a number of girls who had gathered to watch these strange proceedings. They were all merry and happy and had forgotten for the time being that when they left Kingsbridge it had been their custom to treat Sydney Stuart with cold politeness. The Christmas spirit of peace had not yet faded away and there was no one there to remind them that there was any reason for disliking her.

Sydney, with many intentional deviations in her

course, led Elsie to the room which she herself had once shared with Bertha Macy but which she had occupied alone during the last part of the term. Then she untied the bandage.

"There!" she exclaimed.

Elsie looked around. Her own pictures and books were arranged on the walls and table, her own steamer rug lay across the foot of one of the beds, her own pincushion adorned one of the bureaus, and yet this was Sydney's room, the corner room with the two windows and the Braithwaite place to be seen from one of them. She looked at the room and she looked at Sydney, and then she allowed herself to believe that her wish had come true.

"Am I to be here?" she asked, half in a whisper.

"Yes. Are you glad?"

"Glad!"

It was all she ever said on the subject, but Sydney had no doubt about it. Already she was beginning to understand Elsie's deep, undemonstrative nature. There are many such natures, and they suffer more than is ever guessed by those who, being unlike them, cannot realize that although nothing is said, much is meant. But fortunately there is usually some one person at least, who although unlike, possesses the gift of comprehen-

sion. And upon Sydney Stuart this gift had been bestowed.

But although she loved Elsie, and appreciated to the full her staunch friendship, and remembered that she had stood by her when others had deserted her, when Anne herself had deserted her, she did not care for her as she did for Anne. It was Anne, with her gaiety, her wit, her charm of joyousness, her power to please as well as to rule, whose friendship Sydney wanted above all things. All through the vacation Sydney had tormented herself with thoughts of Anne. Suppose she were to come back more hostile than when she left? Suppose she never again would have anything to do with her? How could she bear it? And what had caused it? Why should the sad events in the past, with which Sydney herself had no connection, have made her dislike her? She did not know. She only knew that she liked Anne Talbot better than any girl she had ever known, and to such an extent that she would gladly forgive her former coldness if only she would be different now. All that she seemed to care for was to regain the friendship of Anne. And to-night Anne was to arrive.

And Elsie, loyal, loving Elsie, guessed that Sydney was feeling thus, knew what her nervous, excitable manner meant, and hoped with all her heart that Anne would return to school softened

by her good times during the holidays. It was hard for Elsie to forgive her, but if Sydney would be made happier by Anne's friendship she hoped that it might be given her. But Elsie well knew that it would mean to her a very great change. At present she was Sydney's only intimate friend in the school. She had to fight hard to overcome the jealousy that would make itself felt in spite of all her efforts. But there was no doubt that Sydney had wished to have her share her room for she had managed to bring it about, and in that knowledge Elsie felt great satisfaction.

At about six o'clock that evening the big barge on runners that carried passengers from the railroad station drew up for the second time that day in front of the Wickersham School. With laughter and chattering one girl after another jumped out, ran up the steps of the piazza and into the familiar hall where the teachers and the girls who had already arrived stood waiting to welcome the late comers.

"Holloa, Ruth! How are you, Dolly? Oh, Grace, I'm so glad to see you again! But isn't it hateful to have to buckle down to lessons again? Now, Miss Jennie, you needn't look so shocked! You know it yourself." These were some of the scattered fragments which were to be heard. Anne Talbot, having been one of the first to get into the

barge was one of the last to get out. After shaking hands with the Misses Wickersham she looked around the group.

"Where is Sydney?" she demanded, with the pretty, imperious manner which made her irresistible to so many of her friends. There were very few persons who would not willingly do just what Anne desired when she spoke in this way.

Sydney, who had drawn a little into the background and was hidden by the crowd of girls, heard her above all the hubbub.

"Here I am, Anne," she said.

In a moment Anne's arms were around her neck and the bright, laughing face, sobered for the instant, was pressed against hers. Not a word was said then, but Sydney knew that for some reason the clouds of misunderstanding had been dispelled and that "everything was all right" once more. But when Anne released her and turned to greet some one else, Sydney looked for Elsie. She could not speak then, but she put her hand in Elsie's arm and drew her into the library.

"Anne has come back all right," she whispered.

"Yes, I see she has."

"And aren't you glad?"

"I am just as glad as I can possibly be."

"I know you are. But Elsie, I want to say something. You needn't think that because Anne

has changed that it will make any difference about us, about you and me, I mean. Anne is perfectly fascinating, but—I don't know about her being very steady. At least I don't believe she is as steady as you."

"Thank you," said Elsie, in her dry, humorous way. "Anne is not as steady as I am, and I am not as fascinating as Anne! Well, I never supposed I was. But there goes the supper bell."

"So it is. We must hurry."

"How far down the alphabet did you get while we were away?"

"Oh, we haven't been alphabetical at all. We have talked about everything that happened to come into our heads."

And very soon they were all in their old places at the long table, and the cocoa was being poured and the cold meat handed around quite as if there had never been any vacation, and when Miss Wickersham, frostily dignified once more, spoke in her most learned manner upon the subject of tarantulas, and passed from that to the introduction of tomatoes into this country, the girls all realized that school had begun again and that "Wicky" had reached the T's.

Bertha Macy had not yet arrived. Miss Wickersham the next morning received a letter from her sister, saying that Bertha had a bad cold and the doc-

tor would not allow her to leave home for a few days. He thought however that she would be able to take the journey and bear the change to a colder climate by the end of the week. Anne also received a letter, which was from Bertha herself. This was what she wrote :

"Dear, dearest Anne." ("Huh!" thought Anne to herself. "I supposed I should never be her dear-dearest again. She was awfully mad when she left our house the other night.") "I am too tried for anything that I can't go back to Kingsbridge with the rest of you. Just fancy the pokiness of coming up alone on Saturday. I have the most fearful cold. I caught it the rainy night I was out, the night of your party. I had the carriage window open coming home and I had been so warm." ("I should think she might have been warm, making such awful mischief," interpolated Anne.) "What a perfect party that was! I have lots more to tell you about a certain person. You know who. That Mr. Murray was so queer I couldn't say any more then, but I hadn't told you half of what Julia wrote me. But please don't say anything to Julia about it until I get there." ("As if I would!" said Anne aloud.) "That is the reason I am so provoked I couldn't have gone back with you. I did want to sit with you and tell you the whole thing in the train." ("Did you! Well, it

takes two to sit together, and you would have been Mademoiselle Trio," thought Anne.) "Dear Anne, I am so perfectly devoted to you I just long to see you and tell you all this dreadful story. I am so glad you are such a good friend of mine. I would rather be friends with you than with *any other girl in school.*" ("Would you?" thought Anne, looking at these words which were underlined three times.) "Good-bye now, with fondest love from your very devoted friend, Bertha."

As she looked a sudden thought came to Anne. She examined the writing more carefully. She read the whole letter again. Then she ran upstairs like a whirlwind—so Ruth called after her, whom she had almost knocked down in her haste—and dashing into her room she eagerly seized the box where she kept her letters and unlocked it. Looking hastily through them she selected two, which she opened. They were the anonymous letters which had been the cause of all her indignation against Sydney. She spread them out on the table, one on either side of the letter which she had just received from Bertha.

"The T's are exactly alike," she murmured half aloud, "and so are the S's. The S in 'See' is just like the S in her 'Saturday,' and the I's are something alike, and here is the same word in Bertha's own letter that is in the second anonymous one, 'per-

son.' Indeed, it is in all three of the letters, and I do declare it is written very much the same in all! What a goose she was not to disguise her hand better—for I am perfectly sure now that Bertha wrote these letters and not Sydney. Poor old Syd! How I have been treating her all this time! I shall make up for it as much as I possibly can. I am glad of one thing, and that is that I was nice to her before I found this out. I felt so dreadfully about their fearful trouble and the hateful story Bertha and Julia had made out of it that I just didn't care whether Sydney wrote those anonymous letters or not—but I am mighty glad all the same that she didn't."

With her usual rapidity of decision Anne had already determined absolutely that Bertha was the author of the letters, and nothing could change her. She was as sure of this aspect of the case as she had formerly been of the other. She summoned Ruth and Dolly for a "council of war" at the first opportunity. They studied the three letters and agreed with Anne that there was a similarity in portions of the writing, but not in all.

"You had better not be too sure that Bertha did it, Anne. At least not yet," urged the cautious Ruth.

"And don't be too hard on Bertha," added kind-hearted Dolly. "She really believed Julia's story

and of course she never supposed Murray Stuart was a brother. You see she calls him ' Mr. Murray ' in this letter."

" Oh, Dolly, you do provoke me ! " cried Anne. " You are always standing up for somebody, no matter who it is. How can you make any excuses for Bertha Macy ? Don't I know she did it ? "

Dolly was silent. Ruth Carter was not. She was a little older than Anne, and although she was very fond of her she was not in the least awed by her imperious nature, as perhaps Dolly was occasionally.

" That is just the way you talked about Sydney, Anne," said she. " And you may remember that Dolly and I begged you to wait and not be so sure that she wrote them."

" Yes," said Anne, with unexpected meekness, " I know you did. Yes, I know I felt very sure. Somehow I *always* feel sure of a thing. It is very inconvenient, for it is always getting me into scrapes. If I hadn't been so sure it was Sydney there wouldn't have been any fuss in school at all probably, and that poor dear wouldn't have had to go through having everybody turn against her. Almost everybody. Elsie Brent stuck to her, and you two have always been nice to her. But I have been the worst of all. Just horrid. Perfectly,

hatefully, horrid! What can I do to make up for it? I will go find her now."

She started to her feet, but Ruth and Dolly both held her back.

"Don't do anything more until you are sure," said Ruth. "Even now you know there may be a mistake about Bertha having written them. It may have been Julia Clark or some one else."

"But there is her letter! I am sure I wasn't thinking of the anonymous letters when I read hers this morning. Nothing was farther from my thoughts than that she had written them, and while I was looking at the idiotic stuff about her being so fond of me—oh, such stuff in a letter makes me just *mad*. It's so silly,—it occurred to me that I had never had a letter from Bertha before, and I wondered why she had written this, when she went home from our house the other night in a rather huffy state. You know we all noticed her manner and thought we had probably shown her, in spite of trying not to, that we didn't like her having told that tale. Well, I was reading over the letter, as I said, when suddenly it came to me that those T's and S's were like somebody else's, and I had a letter I had looked at a good deal that had just such T's and S's, and what letter could it be? And then like a flash it came over me, and I rushed up and got out the others,

and the whole thing was as clear as daylight right straight away. Well, as long as you won't let me tell Sydney yet, you must advise me what else to do to straighten matters out. I have been the most to blame in the whole thing. As soon as Bertha gets here I am going to tell her that Murray Stuart is Sydney's brother, and the awful thing she did in speaking in that way before strangers. I intended telling her coming up in the train, though I shouldn't have sat with her all the way as she suggests. Not much! Oh! How I hate and despise such underhand dealings as these letters! We shall have to turn her out of the Kay Cue See. That's one thing certain."

"I don't think any of us have been altogether perfect about the Kay Cue See," said Ruth.

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Well, we didn't K. Q. about Sydney before the holidays."

"I think we did! That is just what we did do, too much! Perhaps if we had *said* more instead of just acting as we did we might have gotten at the truth sooner."

CHAPTER XVI

WHILE Bertha was nursing her cold and her injured feelings in New York she received numerous letters from Kingsbridge, but much to her disappointment not one of them was from Anne Talbot.

"She is not going to answer that nice note I wrote her," thought Bertha, already depressed, and ready to see everything through the smokiest kind of spectacles. "I am sure I didn't want to write to her, for she made me awfully mad, but I thought it was better to be pleasant. I wish now I hadn't, as long as she hasn't answered, and from what Julia writes she has evidently made up with Sydney. Oh, dear, I do wish this old cold hadn't come and prevented my going back on the train with Anne! It would have been such a splendid chance to tell her everything. Now of course Sydney will prejudice her before I come."

It is doubtful if Bertha realized what she was thinking. She would have been surprised if any one had told her that she had made deliberate plans to spoil Sydney's standing among her school-mates. She had begun, it is true, by looking

down upon Sydney because she was poor and had apparently no social position in New York, and then when Sydney in her turn "looked down" upon her and made little effort to disguise the fact that she did not care for Bertha and considered her ill-bred, Bertha also showed her dislike more openly. Bertha was not the only one at fault, for Sydney's attitude from the first had been scarcely friendly. And thus matters had gone on from bad to worse. The anonymous letters had been written with the intention of making known the family affairs of the Stuarts, of which Bertha and Julia had obtained the knowledge in a manner that was anything but honorable, but which had come about partly by accident. Later, when they found that Sydney was suspected of writing the letters and that the subject of them was supposed by the other girls to be Bertha herself, they had decided not to divulge the truth. If anonymous letters were not approved of, they certainly did not wish to be known as the authors of them. It would never do to tell it, they decided. So they said nothing and allowed Sydney to be held responsible. And then Julia had heard in Baltimore the distorted version of the Stuarts' troubles, and disliking Sydney already and having already wronged her, as they knew, they were not at all sorry to seize upon what they called "disgrace in the

family" to justify their own attitude towards her.

And now Julia wrote from Kingsbridge to Bertha in New York that Anne Talbot had "made up" with Sydney. That they had become "very intimate," and that Bertha had better hurry back or she would be too late.

"There is going to be a meeting of the Kay Cue See very soon, I believe, and it is said that something is to be said or done. You had better get back before that if you possibly can. I should tell Anne myself, if you hadn't made me promise not to. It is really my story, for I was the one who found out all about it in Baltimore, and I ought to be the one to tell it."

Bertha's cold was certainly most inconvenient, according to her own views, but there is no doubt that it was of use to others. In her absence there was no one to influence the other pupils to continue their hostility to Sydney, for Julia's was a weaker nature and she was not able to stem the turn in the tide of public opinion. Anne's attitude was the one that counted. She said nothing in public, but it was plainly to be seen that Sydney Stuart was restored to favor, and "all the girls" followed her lead. When Bertha finally arrived, a week after school opened, the first sight that met her eyes when she entered the front door

was that of Anne and Sydney strolling up and down the hall, arm in arm and deep in conversation.

"Oh, hallo, Bertha!" said Anne in her most off-hand manner, turning her head to speak over her shoulder, their course happening to be away from the front door at the moment when Bertha came in. "How is your cold?"

She made no motion towards a warmer greeting. Sydney, on the contrary, stopped and turned back.

"Don't!" said Anne in a low voice, but not too low for Bertha to hear.

However Sydney went towards her and held out her hand. "I hope you are better," she said. She was feeling very happy these days and full of good will towards everybody, even Bertha Macy. She knew nothing of the incident at the Talbots' New Year's Eve party.

She held out her hand but Bertha made no response. She was too angry with Anne to care what was said or done by any one else, and she certainly had no intention of being patronized by Sydney Stuart, she said to herself. So she ignored her civil greeting, and turned to Miss Wickersham, who came out of her room at that minute to welcome her. Then she went up-stairs with Julia Clark, meeting a number of the girls on the way. It seemed to her that no one was very cordial to

her except Miss Wickersham and Julia. She had supposed that "quite a crowd" would gather at the front door to receive her, a week late as she was, and having been ill. It was all very disappointing and disagreeable, and the still faithful Julia found that her friend had returned in a frame of mind that was not altogether amiable.

The next day, at the noon recess, Bertha approached the group in the centre of which Anne was standing. It was a stormy day and they were forced to remain indoors. Sydney and Elsie Brent were not there.

"Anne," said Bertha, "did you get my letter?"

"Your letter?" It would be impossible to describe the coldness of Anne's tone.

"Yes, my letter. I wrote to you the day after you came back to school. Did you get it?"

"Oh, yes, I think I did get one from you."

Bertha was rapidly growing more provoked. The girls were all standing there listening, no one saying a word and every one intensely interested. It was a well-known fact that trouble had been brewing, and already dark rumors were flying about concerning the projected action of the club committee. No one of the uninitiated knew just what was to happen, but there was unlimited conjecture. And now here were Anne and Bertha already measuring their swords. It was certainly

very exciting. And of course Anne must be in the right! To be sure she had done very much the same thing in regard to Sydney Stuart and now she was friends again with her—but still, Anne must be in the right! So it was a distinctly unfriendly group of persons which Bertha had approached.

“You know very well you got a letter from me,” said she. “How perfectly absurd for you to pretend you have forgotten it. Well, you didn’t answer it.”

“What was the use when you were coming back so soon? What was the use of writing anyway?”

“Because I had something very important to say. You know very well what I began to tell you that night at your party. There was a great deal more to tell you, and I think all the girls ought to know about it. It isn’t right to keep it from them.”

“Nobody wants to hear your story, Bertha,” said Anne. “It is a miserable story and it isn’t true, anyhow. I advise you not to say one word about it to anybody. Just forget it.”

“Forget it!” repeated Bertha scornfully. “As if such a thing could be forgotten! No indeed! It ought to be told. I, for one, have no intention of associating with such a person as she is, and I

think the other girls ought to know about it. I am going to tell them. Just because you have changed towards Sydney Stuart—you were mad enough with her before the holidays—just because you have changed there is no reason why ——”

“Hush!” exclaimed Anne imperiously. “Hush! I will talk with you this afternoon, Bertha. Don’t say another word now.”

As Sydney and Elsie entered the room, Bertha turned away.

This conversation had taken place in the school-room, and going to her desk she fastened its lid up with the prop and began to arrange its contents. That is, she made a pretense of doing so, but in reality while she tossed about her possessions she was peeping over the top of the lid at the group on the other side of the room. The girls laughed and talked and recounted their holiday experiences, not one of them apparently giving a thought to her. If Bertha had only availed herself of the opportunity on her return to school to be pleasant with everybody, if she had relinquished her plan of making public the affairs of the Stuarts, if she had not written as she did to Anne, there is every reason to suppose that she might have remained on good terms with her schoolmates. They were no different from other girls. Not one of them was perfect in disposition or character and of course

there would have been quarrels and "makings-up," differences of opinion and occasionally ill-temper or perhaps a dishonorable action, but on the whole girls are naturally inclined to be friendly with one another. Anne herself would probably have expressed her opinion to Bertha as to her speaking so freely at her party, and would have told her the true story of the Stuarts, and then would have dropped the matter entirely, anonymous letters and all, and a semblance at least of peace might have been restored. But that was not Bertha's way. Absorbed in her own view of the affair, which she considered the right view, and forgetting entirely that her own conduct had not been by any means honorable, she prepared to push matters to an extreme, and thus hasten an unfortunate climax.

That afternoon she and Julia Clark went to Anne's room. The hour had been appointed, and Anne's voice answered their knock. Dolly Fearing was there too, and Ruth Carter.

"Of course you don't mind Ruth and Dolly being here," said Anne. Her changeable face showed that she was angry. Her eyes, usually so full of laughter and fun, were cold and searching in their expression, and there was no suggestion of a smile anywhere. She was standing by the table when her visitors entered, and on the table was the box where she kept her letters.

"Oh, no," said Bertha. "I would a great deal rather have them here, so they can hear the truth. Julia is going to tell you just what she heard in Baltimore. She can tell it better than I, for she heard it all from her aunt."

Julia, a pale girl, who looked as though she had not had half the fresh air she needed, was apparently very much overwhelmed with a sense of the importance of her position as chief purveyor of scandal. She seated herself in the rocking-chair, to which Anne had waved her, and began nervously to tilt it to and fro. Bertha took another chair, and Anne sat down on the edge of the bed. Dolly was curled up in the position of an Oriental on her own bed, and Ruth Carter occupied the only remaining chair, which was near the window.

"Well, why don't you begin?" demanded Anne impatiently.

"Oh, yes," said Julia, with a little laugh that betrayed her agitation of mind. "I will. I didn't know Bertha was going to make me tell it." Then she paused.

"Oh, do go ahead, Julia!" exclaimed Bertha.

"I don't believe she has much to tell, after all," said Anne, in a tone that suggested scorn.

"I have, too!" replied Julia, stung into speech. "It is an awful thing that happened. My aunt

never knew these people herself, the Stuarts. I mean. Naturally she wouldn't, for they must be very common. One of the boys, one of Sydney Stuart's brothers, actually killed another boy! They tried to make out that it was an accident, but some one who was near had heard them quarreling, just before the gun went off. He was about fourteen when it happened, and the judges and jury and lawyers and everybody felt so sorry for him because he was so young that they didn't do anything to him, but there is no doubt about its being true, for the Stuarts never held up their heads afterwards, and they moved away from Baltimore and went to New York to live, so that no one should know about it, and the brother is a blighted being. Of course that proves that he did it on purpose and it wasn't an accident. If it had been he would get over it."

"That Mr. Murray who was at your party, Anne, said that he knew them and that everybody knew it was an accident," said Bertha. "He was just trying to stand up for them because they happened to be friends of his, I suppose. It was all in the papers at the time. It is the most disgraceful thing to have happen in your family, I think. The idea of Sydney coming to a boarding school and passing herself off to be as good as anybody! It is perfectly outrageous."

"Have you quite finished your side of the story?" asked Anne.

"Yes, except to tell you that I know for a fact that she is here at half rates. She is a sort of a charity scholar."

"I should think that was Miss Wickersham's affair," said Ruth. "I don't see what difference it makes to us what the different girls' bills are."

"I don't suppose it does, except to show what kind of people the Stuarts are. Think of their accepting such a favor from a boarding-school teacher! You would think they would be ashamed to."

"How did you find that out?" asked Anne. "Did Julia's aunt in Baltimore tell you that?"

Bertha colored and was silent.

"Evidently you can't give your authority for that. Well, I don't think much of that part of your news, then, for I don't believe it is true."

"It is!" cried Bertha hotly. "It is perfectly true. The Stuarts acknowledge it themselves."

"How do you know they do? Did Sydney ever tell you so herself?"

"Of course not."

"Then I can only suppose that you found it out while you were rooming together, and people who find out things in that way ——"

"Anne," interposed Ruth, "wouldn't it be just

as well to tell Bertha and Julia the real truth of the other story? After all, it doesn't make the slightest difference to any of us about the Stuarts' arrangements with Miss Wickersham, but the other story is important, and every one ought to know the truth."

"All right, we will let the other go *for the present*," said Anne. "Ruth is right. You ought to know the real facts of the important part of your tale. First I will tell you, Bertha, that the other night at our house, you were talking to Sydney Stuart's own brother. You actually said in his presence that his brother was a murderer."

"What do you mean?" cried Bertha. "There was no one there named Stuart."

"Yes, there was! Murray Stuart. It was he who told you that you were mistaken."

"Murray Stuart? I thought that fellow's last name was Murray!"

"Well, you made a great mistake then. And I am just going to tell you now, without paint or polish or any other trimming, that I was very, very much provoked with you and awfully ashamed of you for telling such a story at my house before people who were strangers to you. You didn't know but what they were all cousins of the Stuarts, or intimate friends, or something, and there one of them did turn out to be one of the very family,

own brother to the boy himself. I think it was very, very nice of him, and showed what a true gentleman he is, that he didn't tell you then and there who he was. As for the Stuarts being common, as you and Julia seem to think, they are not so at all. They are a very old family. The Stuarts came from Massachusetts, and Mrs. Stuart herself belonged to an old Maryland family. My mother and my aunt have always known her, and my brother and Fred Merriam and Alec Tracy were classmates of Murray when he was at Harvard and knew him very well indeed. They haven't been living in New York long and that is why my mother didn't know they were there, and why I didn't know that she knew Sydney's family, until I went home for these holidays."

"That is why you have taken up Sydney again, I suppose," said Bertha. "You have found out that as far as her family goes she is a proper person to know."

"That is *not* the reason! I have another reason, a much better one. You know very well that I liked her from the beginning, but I allowed myself to be deceived about her. I am sorry enough for it now."

"Anne," interposed Ruth once more. "Better keep to the most important matter and tell Bertha the true story of the accident."

“ Well, I shall settle the other later. Everybody who is anybody in Baltimore knew at the time and knows now, that Philip Stuart and the Appleton boy who was killed were most intimate friends. They had been all their lives. The Appleton boy did not live there, but he came there every year to visit his father’s relations who were named Appleton. His father and mother were dead and he lived somewhere else with his grandmother. Whenever he came South he spent all his time with Phil Stuart. One day they went out shooting together, just as they had often done before. They did have a quarrel about something, but it was nothing serious. Just as boys often squabble, or girls either, as to that. Dolly and I often fight, but if one of us were to die suddenly after a fuss, I don’t suppose any one would think we had murdered each other! And no one whose opinion was worth anything thought it about Phil Stuart. But he felt dreadfully about the quarrel. He told about it right away and he has never been able to get over it. His gun went off accidentally and the other boy was close to him. Oh, it was awful! He died right away I believe, before there was time to do anything for him, or for him to say anything. It was in the country near Baltimore, where the Stuarts had a place, and the Appletons lived next door. Phil Stuart ran right to the family and told

them he had done it. *Of course* there was no judge or jury or anything. There was an inquest and Philip was completely exonerated. But some horrid sensational paper got hold of it and published the story the way you heard it. I suppose your aunt read that paper, Julia. You say she didn't know the Stuarts herself, so of course she didn't hear the rights of the case. But I can tell you that among the nice people of Baltimore there has never been any other opinion than what I have told you. They had a great many warm friends, but they are very, very proud, and very sensitive. Philip is particularly sensitive, my brother says. He has never gotten over his misery and takes an exaggerated view of everything connected with it. He feels all the more awfully because his last words with his friend were disagreeable, quarrelsome ones. Oh, I do feel so sorry for that poor fellow !”

“ I don't see why they didn't stay in Baltimore where you say they were such nice people,” said Bertha. “ What made them come to New York if they had nothing to be ashamed of ? ”

“ Because Mr. Stuart died and they were left very poorly off, and the boys had to leave college and go to work and they could get better positions in New York than they could in Baltimore. It is easy enough to understand that. Now Bertha, I want to ask you something. Have you told any

of the other girls this story? I know you told them before the holidays that there was some disgrace, but have you told any one just what it is?"

"No," returned Bertha shortly.

"Then I advise you not to say another word. If you do, we will tell the true story, and it is much better not to have any more talk about it. It wouldn't do you any good, you may be sure of that."

Bertha made no reply. She recognized the wisdom of Anne's statement, but she was unwilling to acknowledge it.

"And one thing more," said Anne, tapping the box that held her correspondence, "the sooner you own up to having written these anonymous letters about Sydney the better it will be for you."

Bertha fairly jumped. Her confusion would have been evident to the most casual observer. In a moment, however, she regained her composure. She rose to her feet.

"Come along, Julia," said she. "There is no use in staying here any longer to be insulted."

The two went out of the room. Anne turned to her friends. "There!" said she. "What do you think of that?"

"I think it is dreadful!" exclaimed Dolly, almost in tears. Ruth was silent.

CHAPTER XVII

A FEW days after this, when the clang of the rising-bell awoke Sydney and Elsie Brent one cold frosty morning while it was yet dark, and while they were sleepily inquiring of each other if it could possibly be time to get up, they were aroused to complete wakefulness by strange sounds upon their door. There were three loud taps in succession, which were repeated, after a brief interval of silence, three times. Sydney quickly opened the door. As she did so something fell into the room with a clatter which caused her to jump back and give a little scream of surprise.

"What in the world is it?" demanded Elsie, fumbling for the matches.

"I don't know. Do light the candle, quick!" As she spoke she heard the scuffling of feet in a distant part of the hall and a half-suppressed laugh.

The lighted candle revealed a broomstick clothed in a skirt and shawl, with a towel wrapped about the broom part to resemble a hood. In the dusk of the early morning it was rather startling to have such an object fall upon one when one opened the bedroom door, and Sydney felt that she had

been justified in her shriek. Pinned to the shawl was a sheet of paper on which were written the following lines :

"Sydney and Elsie are very nice girls
Who never make frizzes and never wear curls,
But with dear little braidings they do up their hair,
And smooth it and tie it and fix it with care.
They never tell stories, nor write horrid letters,
Inventing strange tales and insulting their betters,
And so we all like them and want them to-night
When the candles are lighted and stars shining bright,
To come to a room on the second floor front
(It is easily found, but if not they must hunt)
Where a feast will be spread with some goodies from town
For a box has been sent to dear Marian Browne.
Don't mention this summons nor breathe to a creature
That a party is on ! If you do, when I meet yer
You'll be sorry enough that you didn't obey !
The Kay Cue has ordered ! There's no more to say.
But that nine is the hour and 'mum' is the word.
If you whisper a sound *you are sure to be heard.*"

Elsie and Sydney read this poem with an interest that may easily be imagined.

"What *do* they mean?" asked Sydney. "The beginning is so queer. It all seems like a hit at Bertha, the frizzes and curls part. But this about writing letters. I remember you kept talking about letters, Elsie, when I first began to know you well. What letters were written?"

"Oh, don't ask me anything!" said Elsie. "I don't want to have anything to do with it. If you want to know, ask Anne or somebody else, but as long as the fuss has blown over and you and Anne are all right again, what is the use of saying anything more about it? I suppose they had some reason for putting that in the beginning of the invitation. I suppose they wanted us to understand why they liked us and were ready to take us back into favor."

"They have always liked you," said Sydney. "I was the one!"

"Well, there's evidently going to be a feast in Marian Browne's room."

"Yes. It will be fun. I suppose Anne wrote this. She is so fond of rhyming." She read the lines again.

"If you don't hurry up and begin to braid your hair, and smooth it and tie it and fix it with care, you will be late to breakfast and get a reprimand and perhaps get punished and perhaps not be able to go to the feast," prophesied Elsie darkly.

"Oh, goody!" exclaimed Sydney, recalled to the present moment. "I forgot all about breakfast. Now who but Anne would ever have thought of going to all this trouble and dressing up a broomstick to bring the summons? What will she do next? I wonder if Bertha got a poem."

But when the members assembled at the appointed hour that evening, Bertha Macy and Julia Clark were not among them. They had received no invitation of any kind, much less a poem, and the affair had been carried through with such secrecy that they were as yet ignorant of the fact that a feast was to be held.

By nine o'clock in the evening every girl at the Wickersham School was supposed to be in bed. Miss Abby had made the usual round of the rooms, tapping at each door, and after asking if each girl was there and needed nothing, had bidden good-night to each by name and gone on her way down-stairs with the pleasant consciousness of having performed her duty. It can scarcely be imagined that the Misses Wickersham did not know that these feasts were occasionally held after bedtime, but as they did not occur very often, and were usually of not very long duration, the teachers no doubt considered it wiser to pay no attention to them, and if possible to keep up a semblance of ignorance. They had had sufficient experience to know that girls will be girls as well as boys, boys. But the members of the Kay Cue See did not credit the Misses Wickersham with so much forbearance, and the most thrilling part of their evening meetings was the necessity for secrecy and quiet.

So, shortly after nine o'clock, with stealthy movements and extreme caution, one after another the girls who had been bidden crept out of their rooms and silently stole towards that of Marian Browne. No one knocked, but turned the handle of her door as noiselessly as possible and entered. Not a word was said at first. When nine girls had assembled, Anne Talbot, who had been sitting on the floor in a corner of the room, rose to her feet. She spoke in a loud piercing whisper.

"I think you are all here who were summoned," she said. "Will the secretary please call the roll?"

The secretary did as she was commanded. Every name was answered, in the same shrill whisper.

"Now," commanded Anne, "lock the door."

This was done.

"And now the feast!" was the president's next order.

Without a word, Marian Browne and her roommate, Gertrude King, opened their closet door. There was a movement of breathless suspense. When the hostesses turned again towards the company it was a difficult matter for the company to repress its enthusiasm. There was a large cake with icing, there were quantities of little cakes, also with icing, white, pink and brown. There

were oranges and bananas. There was—oh, joy of joys—a cocoanut! Marian Browne was particularly fond of a cocoanut in its natural shape, and Marian Browne's family knew it. In fact, she had never allowed them to forget the fact. Then there was a large box of assorted candies, and another containing only chocolates. There were crackers and olives and pickles and nuts, and, crowning delicacy, a jar of orange marmalade. Is it any wonder that the members of the Kay Cue See found it a difficult thing to limit the expression of their appreciation to a whisper? The whispers became a sibilant hiss of delight, and when these dainties were arranged upon the bed (the table was far too small to accommodate the half of them), the girls needed no invitation to draw nearer.

Of course there were not chairs enough, even though some of the nearer neighbors had carried them in from their rooms, so those who had none knelt about the bed, which after all brought them closer to the centre of attraction than would any commonplace chair. The little cakes had been distributed, the large one was in the act of being cut, Marian had just begun to meditate on the best means of noiselessly opening the cocoanut, when a thrilling sound broke upon their ears. Some one was trying the handle of the door! How long it had been already continued, no one knew. It was

evident that the person, whoever it might be, was becoming impatient.

The girls looked at one another for the briefest instant.

"Quick!" whispered Anne, and caught up the corner of the bed spread. Marian and Gertrude on the other side followed her example. Before the others could fully grasp the situation, the spread had been gathered into the shape of a bag, and in that bag rolled in reckless confusion the cakes, candy, fruit, marmalade, nuts and pickles which so short a time before had been temptingly displayed upon the bed. Into the closet went the goodies, and with them went two of the girls. Two more hid behind the head of the bed which jutted out from the wall, three crawled underneath, and Gertrude King jumped into it pulling the coverings well up over her head. This left two girls unprovided for, and they proved to be Marian Browne and Anne Talbot. Anne put her hand to her head and rocked to and fro in pretended anguish.

"I've got an awful headache," she whispered, "or some dreadful pain of some kind. That's why I am here. I came for your mustard plasters or something. Oh, this pain! This pain!" Her groans became so fervid and heart-rending that the girls under the bed began to giggle hyster-

ically. "Hush!" moaned Anne. "My head! My head!"

In the meantime the rattling of the door handle had continued with unabated vigor and determination.

"It is probably Miss Wickersham herself!" whispered Gertrude, emerging for a brief moment from the bedclothes. "Marian, do open the door and act as if you were very sleepy."

Marian did as she was bidden. She drew the bolt, yawned, opened the door a crack. "Who is it?" she asked. "Is it you, Miss Abby?"

She opened the door a little further, only to behold Bertha Macy and Julia Clark.

"Let us in! Let us in!" whispered Bertha. "We never got our summons, and only found out by the merest chance that you were having a feast." She pushed her way in as she spoke, closely followed by Julia.

Marian Browne, who was not of the secret committee, and therefore knew nothing of its projected action in regard to Bertha and Julia, made no effort to prevent their coming. In fact she was too much surprised to say or do anything. The other girls emerged from their hiding places, Gertrude sat up in bed, and Anne, her head making remarkably quick recovery, stood spellbound in the middle of the room. For once she was at a loss for words.

Not so Bertha, however. "Where is the feast?" she asked. "I don't see a sign of anything to eat. I hope you haven't eaten it all up before we got here. That would be too mean!"

This speech put the finishing touch to Anne's indignation, which had been rapidly increasing during her silence, perhaps because of it. She took a step forward.

"Bertha Macy!" she exclaimed. "You certainly are—the—worst—I—ever—did—know!"

She made a perceptible pause after each word which was very impressive. Even the intrepid Bertha felt a thrill of something that resembled fear.

"Don't you know," continued Anne, "that people don't usually go to parties unless they are invited?"

She quite forgot to whisper.

"I do know," said Bertha, also in a loud voice, "that this is a Club meeting, and we're members of the Club and ought to be here."

"No, you oughtn't! No, you're not! You're not members. You've been dropped. Do you think we'd have members that wrote anonymous letters about other members, and told scandal, and *read other people's letters*? For I am perfectly sure that is what you did."

"Anne," said Dorothy Fearing, "you are saying

too much. You mustn't. You don't really know and you oughtn't to talk that way before all the other girls."

As she said this, her kind little face full of distress, Bertha turned and looked at her. Then without a word, Bertha and Julia left the room.

"Now," said Anne, "let's go on with the feast."

She opened the closet door and lifted up the mass of stuff jumbled into the spread. As she turned with it in her arms there was another knock upon the door of the room and almost immediately it was opened from without. This time the newcomer was Miss Abby Wickersham.

"Young ladies, there seems to be a great deal of noise this evening. Miss Talbot, why are you here? Miss Carter, too, and Miss Fearing! Why, what does this mean? Why are you not all in your rooms and in bed?"

It was a question, or rather a series of questions, that no one seemed inclined or able to answer.

"I shall report the matter at once to Miss Wickersham," continued Miss Abby. "In the meantime go to your own rooms without a moment's delay. What are you hiding in that bundle, Miss Talbot? Why, what is it? It looks like the bedspread, but what is dropping from it? Put it down on the floor, if you please, and open it."

Anne did as she was told. Miss Abby looked at its contents and gave an exclamation of astonishment mingled with disgust.

"What is this horrid stuff?" she demanded. "Cake! Pickles! Broken glass! Carry it down at once to the kitchen and let it be thrown away. You have ruined the spread, young ladies. The whole affair is disgraceful. Go to your rooms immediately. Miss Talbot, when you have carried that to the kitchen you may come to Miss Wickersham's study. Miss King and Miss Browne, please come with me. I am completely astonished at such conduct."

It was certainly a tragic ending to Marian Browne's box from home. The culprits did as they were bidden and when they finally emerged from Miss Wickersham's study and retired once more to their rooms they wore the aspect of punished dogs, although Miss Wickersham's only whip had been her caustic tongue.

The matter did not end here, however. Anne Talbot, being perfectly convinced that Bertha and Julia had retaliated upon them for not being invited to the party by informing Miss Abby of it, determined to take strenuous measures at once. The secret committee held a secret meeting the following day and a formal notice was drawn up, in which Bertha and Julia were informed that they were

no longer considered desirable members of the Kay Cue See.

"You are hereby informed" (so ran the notice in what was considered fine legal phraseology), "that you are suspended forever from taking part in the meetings of the Kay Cue See. You are herein notified that Kay Cue See means K. Q. C. and that K. Q. C. means Keep Quiet Club. To Keep Quiet means not to tell tales, not to make up things, not to gossip, not to say disagreeable things about anybody, not to be hateful in any way, shape or manner. The secret committee thinks you have been all these things, and therefore the Kay Cue See bids you farewell. It will be to your advantage now to Keep Quiet!"

This notice was to be sent to the two girls the next day, as soon as it should be properly copied by the secretary. Of course there was much excitement and speculation in the school about the whole affair; the interrupted feast, the displeasure of Miss Wickersham, and above all the dark suspicion that Bertha and Julia had been the means of it becoming known to the teachers. Bertha and Julia were let severely alone and Anne was the centre of the largest group, as usual. Elsie Brent refused to take any part in the proceedings but went off by herself, and Sydney and Dolly hovered anxiously on the outskirts of Anne's

circle. At last Dolly could bear it no longer. She disliked a quarrel with all her heart, and she determined to do what she could to mend matters. The first thing necessary was to take Sydney into her confidence, and therefore she asked her to walk with her in the afternoon. They hurried to the path through the woods and over the hill where they would be safe from interruption. There was little snow to be seen now and the day was mild for the season of the year, although the ground was still frozen.

"Sydney," said Dorothy, plunging at once into her subject, "something has got to be done. I think Anne is too hard on Bertha. We don't really know that she told Miss Abby. We were making a lot of noise last night and very likely Miss Abby heard us and was coming anyway to find out what it was. Of course that is not the only reason they are turning those girls out of the Kay Cue See, but because of you."

"Because of me?" repeated Sydney.

"Yes, I hate to speak of it, but really I think I'd better. Of course you know about those letters?"

"No, I don't. I've heard about letters, but I never really knew. I was perfectly miserable at Thanksgiving time, and until after Christmas, because Anne was so queer and cool to me, and I knew

there were letters mixed up in it somehow, but I didn't ask her about them when we became friends again because I just couldn't. And Elsie advised me to let things go without any more talking."

"Elsie has a lot of sense. But it concerns more than you now, and I think you ought to know."

In a few words Dorothy told her the whole story. The letters, the affair at the Talbots', Bertha's and Julia's version of the Stuarts' troubles, Anne's indignation, her sudden conviction that Bertha had written the letters, and now the determination to dismiss Bertha and Julia from the Club.

"Now," continued Dolly, "I want to know what you think. Of course it was an awful thing for Bertha to do, perfectly hateful, and she has made a great deal of trouble, but at the same time I don't think any of us were perfect. We all talked too much, and we have thought things. We none of us have kept the rules of the Club about being quiet. Oh, Sydney, I hope I haven't said too much!"

"No, you haven't," said Sydney, struggling to retain her composure. "I'm glad you told me the whole thing, Dolly. It was kinder to do so, but of course it—it—makes me feel terribly to know that poor Phil has been so much talked about and—and—such awful things said."

"But no one believed them, Sydney. Not one person believed it was the way Julia's aunt said it was. And Anne and all of us love you all the better for having been through so much."

"Yes, I know. I feel all right about Anne's friendship now, and yours too, Dolly. And Elsie has been my friend all the way through. And now what do you want me to do?"

"Why," said Dolly simply, "I want you to be kind to Bertha and Julia. I don't believe they really meant to be as hateful as they were, and you are the only one who can get things straightened out. What I mean is, that if you are willing, I will talk to Anne and talk to Bertha (I think Bertha has more to do with it than Julia), and see if I can't patch up a peace."

CHAPTER XVIII

OF course Sydney was willing. She did not love a quarrel any more than Dorothy did, and now that matters were explained and she felt so sure of the friendship of all the girls whom she liked, she knew that she ought to be generous to Bertha. She was fully aware that her own conduct had not been altogether irreproachable in the beginning. She had never liked Bertha and had often showed her dislike plainly. She told Dolly now that perhaps it was for this reason that Bertha had behaved so cruelly to her—for it seemed cruel to her and to Dolly also. They talked it all over, and this conversation was the beginning of a friendship between them which lasted without the slightest shadow upon it all their lives, and which the years only served to make closer. It is thus that good so often springs from what seems to be evil.

They returned to the school and Dolly sought out Anne Talbot.

"Have you sent any notices yet?" she asked. She had found Anne in their own room.

"No," replied Anne, who appeared to be look-

ing for something in her trunk, and whose voice came from its depths as she bent over it.

"Well, I want you to promise me something," continued Dolly.

"You needn't ask me to promise not to send them, for I shouldn't be so silly as to make any such promise as that. Those notices have got to go and go they shall. I am going to take them to the post-office myself before supper. I am looking now for that wretched bangle."

She had straightened herself to deliver this speech and now she returned to the search.

"What bangle?" asked Dorothy, although she knew perfectly well.

"That bangle Bertha Macy sent me at Christmas. It is nothing but imitation. I saw that right away when it came, only I wasn't going to tell the family I thought so. Bud discovered it, I know, but Fred Merriam was so prejudiced against Bertha already, I thought I wouldn't give him any further satisfaction. Oh, here it is at last! The idea of putting it in one of Tiffany's boxes! It came from some cheap Sixth Avenue store, like her own. I shouldn't have minded so much if she had sent it in a brown paper parcel, but to try to palm it off as coming from Tiffany's! Oh, it is too much to bear!"

"Oh, Anne, don't be silly! What difference

does it make? What are you going to do with it now?"

"Send it back to her."

"Anne!"

"Of course. Why not?"

"You shan't do any such thing."

"Indeed I shall. Do you suppose I am going to keep it?"

"You needn't keep it if you don't want to. Throw it away if you like, but don't send it back!"

"But why not?"

"Because you are a gentlewoman, and gentlewomen don't do such things. That is why."

Anne was silent. She stood by her trunk, looking at the bracelet. Dolly pursued her slight advantage.

"Do you think your mother would let you send it back?"

Still Anne was silent.

"Please promise me one thing," said Dolly. "Don't send anything, the notice or the bracelet, until to-morrow."

"That's two things," said Anne. Then she looked at Dolly and the corners of her mouth twitched. Presently a dimple began to make its appearance. In another minute she was laughing. She threw her arms around Dolly's neck and gave her a hug that was almost bear-like.

"You little goose," she said, "you wretched creature, always trying to mend broken bones! In other words, make up quarrels and fights! You needn't think I am going to give in *in any way*. No, indeed! I will oblige you by waiting until to-morrow, but to-morrow the notices *and* the bracelet, go!"

But Anne had laughed, and Dolly felt that there were reasonable grounds for hope.

But the peacemaker had not yet finished her day's work. Meeting Miss Abby in the hall soon after her conversation with Anne, she asked her if she might speak to her in private. Miss Abby consented at once and led the way to the study. This was a small office-like room which was regarded by the pupils in very much the same way that a court room is thought of by a prisoner. Here justice was dispensed, punishments meted out and scoldings administered. It was the apartment, in fact, where anything that was in the least disagreeable always took place. It was impossible for any pupil, no matter how innocent her conduct nor how irreproachable her standing, to enter the study without feeling a thrill of apprehension. In the minds of the Wickersham girls it was always spelt with a capital S. To be sure if Miss Wickersham herself were not seated in the Chair of Justice the ordeal was not apt to

be quite so formidable, but even with the milder-mannered Miss Abby it could cause dismay. There was something about the little barely-furnished room, with its office desk, its bench for the culprit, and its swinging chair in which sat the presiding judge, which, as Anne Talbot expressed it, made you feel a sympathy for the victims of the Spanish Inquisition which nothing else could accomplish. You were going to be morally drawn and quartered when you entered that room.

So Dolly, being motioned to the bench by Miss Abby, felt her knees shaking under her in spite of the righteousness of her cause, and Miss Abby (who had closed the door with a clang which brought to mind the famous couplet "Leave hope behind, all ye who enter here!") became at once convinced that Dorothy Fearing was guilty of *something*, and no doubt she had come to confess it.

It was somewhat surprising, therefore, to Miss Abby when Dolly, with a courage that astonished even herself, suddenly opened the subject, not with a confession, but with a question.

"Miss Abby," said she, "will you please tell me if you heard the noise yourself that we were making last night, or if one of the girls told you that we were having a party?"

Miss Abby surveyed her for a moment in silence. She was a lady of mature years and extremely dignified bearing. She was so stout that according to all the laws of nature she should have been jolly, but she was not. She wore spectacles, and a dark brown pompadour surmounted her large forehead. She had no sense of humor, but she had a kind heart. Miss Abby in her own proper character would seldom have been severe, but she passed through life as Miss Wickersham's sister, and she never allowed herself to forget that she must adapt herself to the part and live up to the position. The girls feared Miss Emma Wickersham, liked Miss Abby, and loved Miss Jennie.

"I don't know precisely why I should answer such a question," said Miss Abby, after the slight pause, during which she had considered how her sister Emma would have made reply.

"Well, of course there is no real reason for you to answer," said Dolly, whose courage was rapidly increasing. She was so thoroughly in earnest that she forgot to be afraid. "But I do wish you would tell me, Miss Abby, for a lot depends on it."

"Perhaps it would be advisable for you to explain more fully, Miss Fearing. What difference can it make? You were all engaged in wrongdoing and were discovered. Miss Wickersham has

administered her rebuke and decided on the form of your punishment. It is not necessary for us to discuss the matter any further."

"Yes, it is, Miss Abby! Indeed it is! It makes all the difference in the world. There are fusses and fights going on, and things are in a regular mess."

"Miss Fearing! Such language is more suited to one of the boys at Pratt Academy than to a young lady at the Wickersham School!"

"Oh, I know, Miss Abby, but you must excuse me. I've got so much on my mind. I'm trying to straighten things out, and haven't got much time to do it in. Couldn't you just tell me yes or no if I ask you whether Bertha and Julia told you? Couldn't you, dear Miss Abby?"

Dolly had a sweet voice, and her pleading tones went straight to the heart of Miss Abby. After all there was really no reason why she should not gratify her. Surely Emma could not object! But she would not act too hastily. It seemed an excellent opportunity to procure information in regard to a matter which had long since reached the ears of the sisters but of which they had learned no precise details. Miss Abby was one who took a great interest in small matters. She loved to discover things, partly for the pleasure of doing so, and partly because she felt that it added

to her importance in the eyes of Sister Emma. They knew that a secret society existed in the school, but just what it was they had never been able to find out. Miss Wickersham disapproved on principle to secret societies, no matter what the object, but the girls had been so cautious in the management of this one that, although this was the second year of its existence, the teachers knew very little about its rules and regulations. So here was Miss Abby's chance.

"Was your party last night merely a friendly gathering, or was it the meeting of your Club?" she asked.

And Dolly, taken unawares, and forgetting the need for caution, answered, "It was a Club meeting."

"You have them every week, I believe."

"Almost every week."

"And your object?"

"To keep quiet and to do good and have fun and — Oh, I ought not to be telling!"

"Why not?"

"Because it is all a secret! Anne will never forgive me."

"It is a secret society, then, and Miss Talbot is at the head of it?"

Dolly was silent.

"Unless you can give me the particulars I am

asking for, you cannot expect me to give you the information you desire, Miss Fearing."

"Oh, Miss Abby! Aren't you going to tell me? Please, Miss Abby, without making me tell!"

But Miss Abby, pleased with what she considered her profound astuteness, determined to be firm. All of Dorothy's earnestness and pleading failed to move her. Here was her opportunity and she would make the most of it.

"Tell me all you can about your secret society, and I will then tell you what you wish to know," she repeated.

Dolly felt very much distressed. It did not seem to her quite fair on Miss Abby's part to insist on her telling her what was really the secret of many others besides Dolly, but on the other hand, perhaps the teachers had a right to demand information as to what went on in their school, and also it seemed to Dolly very important to know whether Bertha and Julia had "told."

"Do all the girls in the school belong?"

"They all had a chance to. Some have gone out."

"Why did they go out?"

"Oh, they were dropped for one reason or another. There are rules, of course, and they broke the rules."

"Then it is really what might be called a *clique*? That is precisely what we wholly disapprove of in the school, Miss Fearing. Miss Wickersham has always desired that there should be nothing of that sort. Nothing can come out of it but ill feeling and trouble."

Dolly was inclined to agree with her, though she did not say so. Certainly there had been much ill feeling and trouble, although it had not arisen altogether in the Club.

"Since you have told me this much," said Miss Abby, magnanimously, "I will fulfil my promise and say that I did not hear from Miss Macy or Miss Clark that you were breaking the rules of the school last night and holding a gathering after nine o'clock. You made so much disturbance that you could be heard very distinctly when I passed over the stairs. I am *very* glad to know that Miss Macy and Miss Clark would have nothing whatever to do with the party, as I infer to be the case, since you ask me whether they told of it. You may go now, Miss Fearing. It is time to make ready for supper."

Dorothy departed, feeling that her errand had not been altogether a success. After supper she asked Bertha and Julia if she might have a conversation with them, and they went to their room, having procured permission to absent themselves

from the usual evening games. This part of her task was what Dolly liked the least. It would have been far easier to let the whole thing go, and make no effort to bring about a reconciliation. She did not admire nor care for Bertha or Julia, and she felt that they were no addition to the Club. Only her intense love of peace kept her to her resolution. If anything in the world could be done to restore peace, she must do it.

"Bertha," she began, as soon as the door was closed, "I hope you won't mind what I am going to say."

Bertha's condition of mind during the past few days had not been happy. She found that she had forfeited by her conduct the good opinion of all the girls whom she had most wished to have for her friends. She hated her present position, but she had fully determined never to yield, for she told herself again and again that she was in the right. She answered Dolly rather shortly.

"It depends upon what you say."

"I suppose it does, but I mean it in the most friendly way, Bertha." It was impossible to doubt Dolly's sincerity. She had a simple, straightforward way of speaking that was convincing, and her face was so sweet, her hazel eyes so true.

"Well, what is it?"

"If you would only say something right away

to the Club committee and to Sydney, say that you are sorry, I mean, I think it would all come right."

"If you mean apologize, you needn't say another word. You needn't think I shall ever do that."

"Well, perhaps not regularly apologize, but you could show in some way that you didn't mean to be so cruel to Sydney."

"Cruel!"

"Yes, I think it was cruel."

"But we heard it," put in Julia, who had been an eager listener, but who as yet had said nothing. "How did we know it wasn't true? I told Bertha the story of the Stuarts just exactly as I heard it from my aunt."

"It doesn't seem worth while to tell a bad story," said Dolly. "Why not let it be forgotten?"

"Oh, no!" protested Julia. "I think those things ought to be known about people. I have heard my aunt say that very thing. She always says the worst ought to be known, and people judged accordingly."

"Then I don't agree with your aunt," said Dolly, with more vehemence than was usual with her. "I think the worst had better be forgotten and the best remembered, for very often the bad

isn't true. It wasn't this time. If your aunt hadn't remembered the worst and told it, the dreadful story about the Stuarts would never have been known here, and it is not true at all. But it isn't worth while to talk any more about that. I just wanted to tell you, Bertha, that Sydney is perfectly willing to be friends again if you are."

"And what about Anne?" asked Bertha.

"Well, of course Anne feels very indignant, but——" she paused, not knowing exactly how to continue.

"It was perfectly outrageous of her to accuse us of telling Miss Abby last night."

"You see, Miss Abby came just after you were there, so of course it was natural to suppose you had met her and perhaps told her."

"Do you think we told her?"

"No, I never thought so, and this afternoon I saw Miss Abby and asked her, and she said you had not."

At this moment Bertha's self-control gave way and she began to cry. To both Julia and Dorothy this was a complete surprise.

"Oh, it is so dreadful," sobbed Bertha, "to be accused of what isn't true!"

Dolly hesitated, but only for an instant. Then she said very quietly: "Then perhaps you can understand, Bertha, how badly Sydney has felt

She was accused, you know, of writing those letters."

Bertha did not reply, but Dorothy felt convinced that this last remark of hers had made an impression, although perhaps it was but slight.

It is impossible to say what would have resulted from this conversation had it been continued. Perhaps Bertha's heart would have become softened and the secret committee would have yielded, and perhaps the two girls would have been permitted to retain their membership in the Kay Cue See, but the matter was destined to be settled in another way. Even while they were talking there came a knock upon the bedroom door. Julia opened it. Miss Jennie was standing in the hall.

"Young ladies, please come down to the dining-room at once. Miss Wickersham has something important to speak to you about," she said.

Bertha hastily dried her eyes and the three went down. They supposed at first that they were the only ones summoned to the conference, but they found when they reached the dining-room that every member of the school was present, each girl sitting in her accustomed place at table, but with her chair turned towards Miss Wickersham, who stood by the door which led into the kitchen at one end of the large room.

"Are we going to have an extra meal?" whispered the incorrigible Anne to her neighbor. "I certainly didn't have half enough supper."

Then ensued a pause of breathless suspense. All eyes were fastened upon Miss Wickersham. Something was coming. What was it? Never before had the school been summoned to an evening conference in the dining-room. Not within the memory of the oldest inhabitant had such an event taken place. What was it?

And then the bolt fell.

"Young ladies," said Miss Wickersham, and never had her manner been quite so icy, "I have been confirmed in the suspicions which I have long entertained. I find to my surprise and displeasure that a secret society exists in this school! I do not know its name, its object, or its membership, but I do know that I heartily disapprove of anything of the kind. To me, there is nothing more odious than a community divided into sets. This school is a community. We must live together on equal terms so far as possible. I feel, indeed, I am sure, that the existence of this society may account for much trouble that I have been perfectly aware of for some time, but have been unable to cope with. Therefore, young ladies, from this moment your society is disbanded. You will hold no more meetings, nor will you take any

action connected with it, and you understand, I hope, that this is final. Whoever disobeys me will be suspended from school for a shorter or a longer time as may seem proper to me."

"Oh, Miss Wickersham!" cried Anne, springing to her feet. "You haven't heard right! The Kay Cue See is a splendid thing. We do lots of good. We——"

"Miss Talbot, I did not ask you your opinion."

"No, I know you didn't, but—oh, Miss Wickersham!"

"Not another word, if you please. It is quite useless to protest. My opinion of such societies has always been well known and, I supposed, understood. It pains me deeply to find that it has been disregarded. Young ladies, your Club is no longer in existence. We will now return to our usual recreations in the library."

In this manner the Kay Cue See came to an end. After the first shock of disappointment and chagrin, after the first indignation had subsided, even Anne was constrained to acknowledge that the Club had not been altogether a success. The summary manner in which members were dismissed had always caused ill feeling. There was a certain discrepancy between the rule that insisted upon kind feeling and the avoidance of gossip, the "keep quiet" rule, and that which per-

mitted a secret committee to dispense arbitrary punishment. Certainly very few of the members had refrained from talking during the troubles of this winter, and yet the secret committee had been on the point of dismissing only Bertha Macy and Julia Clark and allowing every one else to retain membership. Anne at last admitted to Dolly that there was something to be said on both sides. This was some time after Miss Wickersham's decisive action, however, and when Anne's indignation with Dolly for what she at first had termed her "outrageous interference" had had time to abate. There is no denying that she was very angry with Dolly when she first heard it, for of course Dolly confessed the whole thing to her that very night.

CHAPTER XIX

DURING all these troubles and exciting affairs, Sydney Stuart had continued her visits to the little lady in the next house. Mrs. Braithwaite soon grew to be very dependent upon her, and Sydney was quite fascinated by the inconsequent yet charming ways of the blind woman. There was something odd and baffling about her that piqued one's curiosity, and the combination of gaiety and extreme sadness in her temperament made her attractive to Sydney, who although so young already found human nature the most interesting study in the world. She was unconscious of this herself as yet, but it was the case. She was always hoping that Mrs. Braithwaite would tell her the story of her life, as she had promised to do, but as yet nothing had been said. Mrs. Braithwaite played to her, walked with her in the garden when the weather permitted, or talked to her on many subjects in her beautiful sitting-room, but that of her sorrow had not been touched upon.

The old servant, Eliza, after Sydney's first call, appeared to approve of her mistress's new friend.

It relieved her of much responsibility and gave her more time for her other duties, so Eliza permitted the intercourse to continue. There was no doubt that it was she who ruled the household, mistress and servants alike. There was another maid, also of mature years, and the old man who worked on the place. There might have been a whole retinue of men and maids so far as Mrs. Braithwaite's means were concerned, but Eliza preferred that there should be no more.

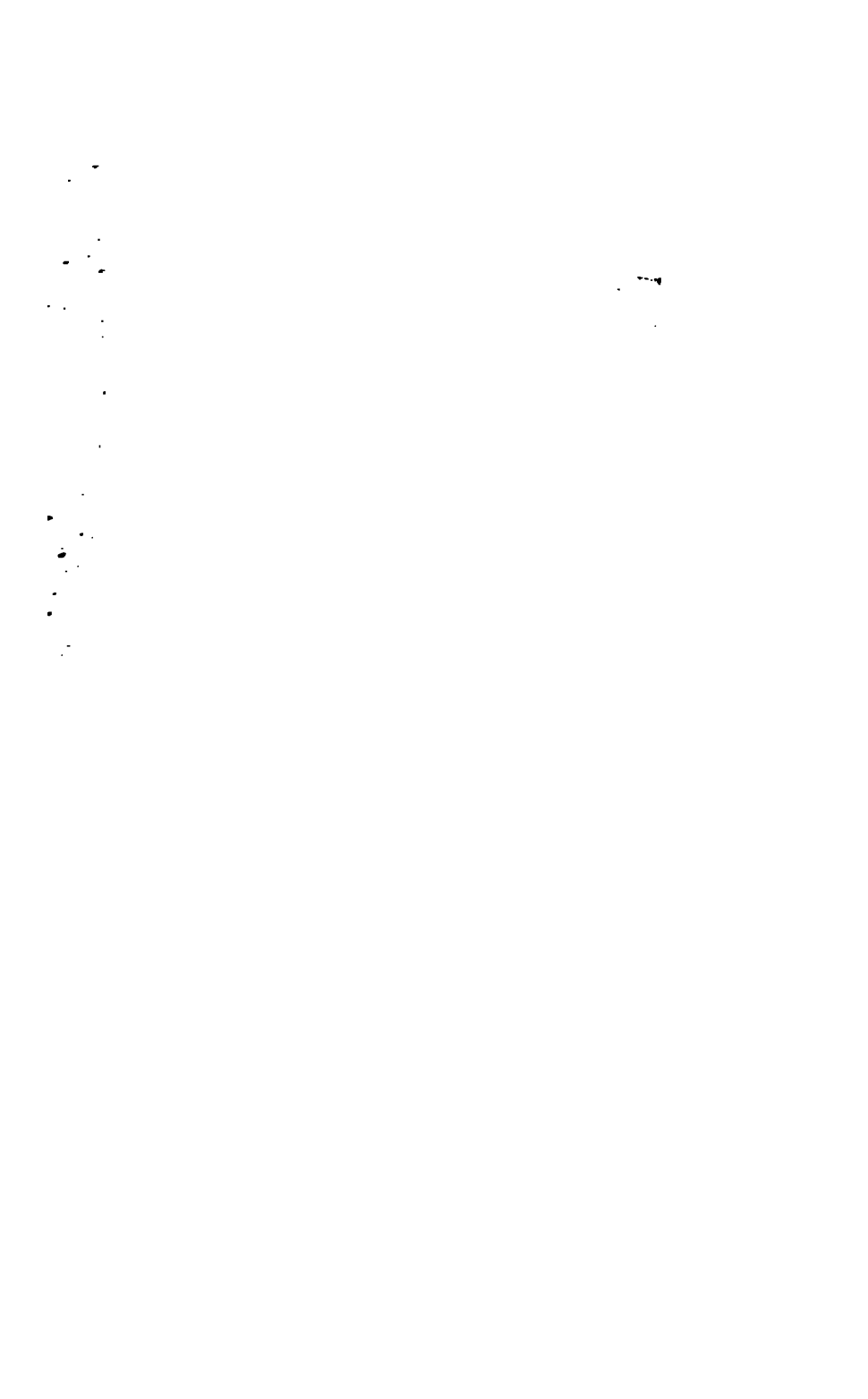
The winter wore away, and then one day it seemed as though spring had really come. Although patches of snow still lay upon field and hill the ground had softened, and the oozy mud of the roads showed that the frost was at last melting which had held them stiff and hard so long. The breeze which blew gently from the South had a spring mildness in its breath, and a bluebird was seen to perch and flit and perch again in Mrs. Braithwaite's garden. She was walking there leaning upon Sydney's arm at the time.

"Hark!" she said in a breathless way. "Is not that a bluebird?" And then Sydney saw it and told her she was right.

"I thought so!" she said softly. "My dear boy would have been the first to discover it. He loved to see the first bluebird. I have never told you about my boy, have I, Sydney?"



"THEY TURNED THEIR STEPS TO THE HOUSE"



"No, Mrs. Braithwaite, and I have always hoped you would. Was he your son?"

"Oh, no, my grandson. My only daughter's only child. I never had a son of my own, and perhaps for that very reason I loved him more even than most grandsons are loved. I am tired of walking now, Sydney. Please take me back to the house."

They turned their steps towards the house, and Sydney felt a keen pang of disappointment. She had hoped that the Little Lady had been about to tell her the story. Nothing more was said until they reached the sitting-room up-stairs.

"Can you stay with me a little longer?" asked Mrs. Braithwaite. Her voice, which could be almost youthfully joyous, had lost its note of gaiety and was sad.

"Yes. I needn't go for some time. We are having a half-holiday this afternoon, and most of the girls have gone for a drive. They hired the big barge, and invited Miss Jennie to go, too."

"That was nice. And did you not care to go with them? Did you give up that pleasure to come see an old woman like me?"

"I wanted to come, and besides I could not go to drive. You see we haven't a great deal of money, Mrs. Braithwaite, and it is necessary for me to be very economical. Anne Talbot wanted

me to go as her guest but I would not do that. Anne is very generous, but I would rather not let her do so much for me. She is always wanting to give me things and pay for me, but I won't let her."

"You are right," said the Little Lady. "I am glad for my own sake that you were free to come to see me to-day, but I am sorry you could not have had the drive."

She went to the piano and after a few random notes she began to play bits from the Pastoral Symphony.

"Do you hear them?" she asked. "Do you hear all the sounds of spring and the great world of outdoors? How my boy loved the spring!"

Presently she left the piano and went to her usual chair. "Where are you, my dear? Come and sit beside me and let me hold your hand, and I will tell you about my boy."

Sydney did as she was desired. She was uncertain what to say, so she only pressed the hand in silence, the hand with the long delicate fingers which showed such marvelous strength upon the piano.

"He came to me when his mother died," said Mrs. Braithwaite, beginning at once to speak. "He was only a baby then. His father had also died suddenly, two weeks after my daughter's

death. My boy was barely a year old. The arrangement was that he should live with me and be my adopted son as well as my grandchild, but that he should spend four months of each year with his father's family, who loved him too. Who did not love him? But they were only his aunts and uncles. There were no grandparents there, so I had the greater right to him. Sydney, he was my idol! I loved him as I had never loved any one before, which is saying much, for I have an eager nature. The nature which, when it gives love, gives in no stinted measure. It has caused me suffering, but it is the true way to love."

She ceased speaking for a few minutes, and Sydney dared not break the silence. She scarcely moved, except to stroke with extreme gentleness the fine old hand that lay within her own. Presently Mrs. Braithwaite continued her story.

"His whole childhood was a joy to me," she said. Her voice had become stronger, and its tone was reminiscent of her grandson's happy youth. "He was so dear and affectionate, so full of charm. He was always sunny and bright. Every one loved him. From the time that he was able to speak he won friends. There never was a child who had so many. When he went to his father's people it was the same. It was because he loved every one. He had a quick temper, but he never

harbored an unkind thought. It was over in a flash, if anything went wrong. In the briefest instant the clouds would pass by and the sun be shining again. I could talk to you for hours about his beautiful nature, but I must hurry on. I want to tell you about the tragedy. For there was a tragedy."

"Have you had a tragedy too in your life?" said Sydney in a low voice. "We have had one too."

"My dear, there are many tragedies in many lives, but they are not always known. Mine was."

"And so was ours."

"You shall tell me of yours some day. Perhaps we shall be able through sympathy to comfort each other. As I said, my boy went each year to visit his father's family, and there he had a friend, a dear and intimate friend of whom he was more fond than of any other. He was a boy of about his own age, and though I never saw him I grew to know him through my dear child, and to love him too. They played together when they were little, and later they had other boyish sports. They were very congenial. One day they went out with their guns." Sydney made a sudden movement. What was coming? "But in some way, purely accidental, as they were getting

over a fence, the other boy's gun went off, and Braith was instantly killed."

"Braith?" repeated Sydney in a choked voice. "Was your grandson's name Braith?"

"Yes," he was always called that. His name was Braithwaite Appleton."

Sydney suddenly let go of the hand she had been holding. Could the blind lady have seen her she would have been startled by the expression of her young face, such misery was in the eyes.

"It happened in Maryland," continued Mrs. Braithwaite, "near Baltimore. I have always felt so sorry for that poor boy. We never blamed him. Even though he told us they had quarreled just before it happened we never blamed him in the least. Braith had a very quick temper, and it was nothing but a sudden falling out that would have been forgotten directly. I have never seen him, though I have always wished to, very much. They told me he was heart-broken and very sensitive, and nothing could comfort him. I have always felt nothing but sorrow and sympathy for him, for I knew how he loved Braith. I wish I could tell him so."

"Who was the boy?" asked Sydney. Her voice might have been another's, it was so unlike her own. Mrs. Braithwaite, quick to catch the significance of every tone, turned towards her.

"My dear," she said, "you must not take it so to heart. It is all over now."

"No," said Sydney. "It is not all over. The boy who did it still lives. What is his name, Mrs. Braithwaite?"

"His name is Stuart, like your own. I told you the name of Stuart was of significance to me."

"Was it Philip Stuart?"

"Yes, Philip. My boy always spoke of him as Phil."

"I thought so," said Sydney, very quietly. "He is my brother."

For an instant there was perfect silence in the room, save for the crackling of a log upon the hearth. Outside some sparrows chattered in the ivy which grew over the house. Except for this it was very still everywhere. Again Mrs. Braithwaite turned towards Sydney. Then, with a sudden movement she rose to her feet and held out her arms.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she exclaimed. Her voice shook with the intensity of her emotion. "Where is your brother? Send for him! Let me see him! My dear boy's best friend, the last one who saw him alive! Why has he kept away from me? Did he think that I could possibly blame him? Your brother! And I have loved you from the first." She had Sydney in her arms

now, and was leaning against her. They stood thus for several minutes. Presently Mrs. Braithwaite became calmer. "I want you to write to your mother and brother at once, my dear, and have them come to me here. They shall stay at the hotel, for they will be more comfortable than in this old house, but they must be my guests from the time they leave New York. There! I am tired! I must lie down. This is too wonderful. Why, Sydney, child! Why did you never guess it? My name might have told you. My boy was named for his grandfather, and it is not a usual name."

"I never heard him called Braithwaite," said Sydney, trying hard to speak calmly. "He was always 'Braith,' and I supposed that was his real name. I was quite a little girl, you know, and it never occurred to me. Of course I knew it was Appleton, but you have never spoken of that name."

"I see. It is all perfectly natural, but still it seems strange. And I thought your family still lived in Maryland, and although I was struck by the name of Stuart when I first met you, when I heard you came from New York I thought no more about it, for I know there are many Stuarts. My home was in Boston before I came here, and I never went to Baltimore. My

blindness was coming on for a long time before my boy died, and after that it became very much worse, so I never left my home. It has prevented my taking more active measures to find your brother, but I have longed so to know him, that I might tell him not to grieve so deeply! And now I shall have the opportunity! I can scarcely believe it."

She relapsed into silence and presently Eliza came up-stairs, and then Sydney went back to the school.

She had promised Mrs. Braithwaite that she would write to her mother and post the letter that afternoon, so that it might leave Kingsbridge by the evening mail, and she must lose no time. Fortunately, as it was a half holiday, there were no school duties to be thought of, so she wrote the letter immediately and walked with it to the post-office. It seemed strange, now that everything was so plain, that this wonderful discovery had never been made before. Why had it suggested itself to no one? Sydney thought it over as she walked along the muddy road. She said to herself that she must have mentioned Mrs. Braithwaite by name in her letters. Then it occurred to her that she always spoke of her as "the Little Lady," the name by which all the girls knew her. Possibly she had never written that of Braithwaite.

What would her mother say when she received her letter? What would Phil say? She hoped that he would consent to come. He was so morbid on this subject, and shrank so from contact with people, especially those who were in any way connected with the sad story. If once he could meet Mrs. Braithwaite and see her sweet face and hear her gentle words, Sydney felt sure that he would realize her sincerity, and perhaps in time he would become more natural. In the meantime there was nothing to do but wait, and hope for the best, and pray that all might be made right.

She was walking slowly back, lost in these thoughts, when she became conscious of a quick footstep behind her, and then came a laughing greeting.

"So it is you, Miss Stuart! I thought so, but I couldn't be sure until I got up to you and so I didn't dare shout. It might have been a proud and haughty lady whom I didn't know and who would have swept me off the earth with scorn because I spoke to her."

"Why, Mr. Tracy! Where did you come from?" For it was Alec Tracy with his valise in his hand and evidently just from the train.

"Cambridge, thank you. I had a chance to cut, and so I have run up to see my mother. Couldn't help it, don't you know. Don't know

what she will say. Of course she'll be awfully sad at seeing me."

"Oh, of course!" laughed Sydney, who did not feel at all sad herself at seeing him.

"I'm glad it happened to be you and none other," continued Alec, "for I want to tell you how glad I am you're the sister of Murray Stuart. You know I never found it out until I met old Murray at the Talbots', New Year's Eve. We were pretty good friends when he was at college, and we've all of us missed him and were sorry he had to leave."

A sudden impulse moved Sydney to speak more freely than she would have done had she paused to consider. She and Alec were very good friends, and she knew that he knew all their story, and that he had been present when it had been talked about at the Talbots'.

"I have just found out the most wonderful, the strangest thing," she said. "I can't help speaking of it, and as you know Murray so well you seem like an old friend, Mr. Tracy."

"Of course I'm an old friend, and so I wish you wouldn't be so mighty particular to say 'Mr. Tracy,'" returned he promptly. "But what have you found out?"

"That Mrs. Braithwaite is the grandmother of Braith Appleton, the boy—the boy, you know—"

"I know," said Alec, his voice full of sympathy. "Well, that is queer! How did you find it out?"

Sydney told him the circumstances and he listened with deep attention.

"It is a mighty good thing," he said when she had finished. "I believe it will make all the difference in the world to Phil to find that she feels that way about him. He must be especially sensitive, and so it has made him more morbid than it would a good many other fellows. I am awfully glad about this. May I tell my mother what you have told me? She would be so interested, and she knows all about your family, you know."

Sydney willingly consented, and by the time she reached the school she felt better for having had this friendly talk. It did not occur to her that Alec had come considerably out of his way in order to accompany her. She was only very glad that the world had become so full of friends.

She told Elsie of what had occurred next door. It was easier now to talk about Phil's trouble than it once had been, and Elsie already knew the story. Anne and Dolly were told also but to no one else did she speak of it, and they were asked to say nothing about it. That very evening came a note from Mrs. Tracy, full of kindness, and telling Sydney that she hoped very much that Mrs. Stuart and Philip would stay with her during

their visit to Kingsbridge. "The Kingsbridge Hotel is a poor place, we all know, and your family seem like old friends to me, my dear, not only for your own sake but because my cousins Mrs. Talbot and Mrs. Dana have known your mother so long. Please send me your mother's address by the bearer of this and I will write to her, begging her to give me the pleasure of a visit for as long as she wishes to stay."

All this made Sydney very happy, but at the same time she felt anxious. How would Phil take it? He was so unlike other boys. Could he be convinced that Mrs. Braithwaite really did not blame him? Had this discovery been made in time to effect a cure, or was it too late? Phil was seventeen, and for four years he had brooded over his strange sorrow. His family had never been able to rouse him from it. His nature, once so sweet and loving, had become warped—it might be hopelessly warped. Only time would show what effect the meeting with Mrs. Braithwaite might have upon him.

CHAPTER XX

SYDNEY went in to see Mrs. Braithwaite the next day. She found the Little Lady in a state of restless impatience.

"Have you written?" she asked.

"Yes, Mrs. Braithwaite. The letter went yesterday. I think mother must have it now."

"And will they start to-day?"

"I hardly think they will do that. You know this is Saturday, and they will have to make plans and get ready. I think they will come the beginning of the week."

"Oh, they must! They must! I might die before I see him. There is no knowing. I am old now, you know. Very old. Oh, how I long to clasp that poor boy to my heart and tell him not to grieve! And to tell him that already I love him and have loved him for years, because he was my boy's friend. Why, when Braith would come home after his visits in Maryland he could talk of nothing but Phil, and what he had been doing with Phil, and what a friend he was. They used to write to each other."

"Yes, I know," said Sydney. "It was so funny to see Phil writing to him. He hated writing let-

ters but he always answered those he got from Braith. But, Mrs. Braithwaite, you must not expect him to get over his trouble at once, even though you are so ready to have him come. Phil has been almost morbid over this, and he has a strange nature now. He isn't like other boys any more."

"My dear," said the Little Lady, "do not be troubled. Our Heavenly Father has some wise purpose in bringing your brother to me at last, and He had a wise purpose in letting him suffer first. I have great faith, Sydney. I have had much sorrow, but I have also much faith. The love we have for our fellow beings is a part of Heavenly love. It is in fact the same thing. I think the power to love which God has given me was given for some good purpose. I will love your poor brother and he will feel that he is able to help a poor old blind woman who was the grandmother of his friend. It will all work together for good, Sydney. Of that I am perfectly sure."

And during the Sunday which intervened before she could hear from her mother, Sydney thought of these words more than once, for strangely enough the sermon which she heard that day in church was preached from that text. It strengthened her hope that Philip might outlive his sorrow and be a nobler, stronger man because of the suffering of his boyhood.

"Monday is always the hardest day in school," said Anne Talbot indignantly. "Somehow the lessons on Monday are especially difficult. I know they are longer. By actual count the lessons for Monday are at least two pages longer than those for other days. It is very evident that the teachers take advantage of the holiday we have Saturday to measure off an extra length of learning. As if holidays ought to be used up on study, anyway!"

She was very indignant. She and Dorothy were dressing for breakfast this Monday morning when she thus opened the conversation.

"And as if everybody didn't know that it is especially hard to settle down to work again when you have had a few hours off! When *I* keep a school, things will be different, and you can all send your children to it in perfect confidence that things will be made as easy for them as possible. They shall never be forced to do a thing they don't want to, and lessons will be only an amusement and a joy."

"Fancy you keeping school!" laughed Dolly. "Shall you do your hair like dear Wicky, and talk alphabetically at supper?"

"No, indeed! The alphabet shall be banished from school altogether. The children shall be taught to spell words the way they sound. It is

much more sensible. And as for talking! Why, we'll all talk about any old thing just as it comes up, and we'll have *méringues* and ice cream and chocolate *éclairs* every day. *That* will be a school worth going to. Dolly," with an abrupt change of subject, "you think you're a very wise little person, don't you?"

"Why, I didn't know I did."

"Oh, yes, you do! You thought you were going to make everything straight by your wonderful visit to Miss Abby and your talks with Bertha. Now you see you haven't. I shan't say anything more about the untimely death of the Kay Cue See. My injured feelings are too deep for words. If it had been anybody but you who went to Miss Abby I should simply never have spoken to you again, but somehow it is impossible to stay mad with you. But you haven't done any real good. You can't change a person like Bertha Macy. We have found out what she is and you may depend upon it she will always be like that. It isn't in her to be nice or honorable or kind. Don't you notice how hateful she still is to Sydney? Nothing will ever make her different."

"It won't if we all turn against her," said Dolly. "Of course if we are going to make up our minds to have nothing more to do with her, and scarcely speak to her, and sort of point her out as a kind of

a criminal, she will probably go on being worse and worse."

"It can't be possible that you would have us all treat her as if she hadn't done anything out of the way? Never let her know we are not used to that kind of doings? Just let her go on making mischief and trouble as long as she likes?"

"No, of course not. But now that we have shown her we don't like that sort of thing it seems mean not to help her again if she wants to be helped. Of course if she doesn't, that is another matter. I don't know how to express it exactly, but it seems to me you have got to show a person that you trust them a little, or else they will feel awfully discouraged and not try a bit to do or to be anything worth trusting. And you have got to help them."

"Oh, Dolly, Dolly!" groaned Anne. "You're too much for one. I can't follow the lofty flights of your charity. I'm too much of an every-day person. If Bertha were very poor and hungry and all that, I would willingly give her all the money I could scrape together, but as she isn't, I don't want to have anything more to do with her, for I think she is dishonorable, and she isn't a lady."

"And I think," maintained Dolly stoutly, "that giving money isn't everything. If by being

friendly and encouraging you can make a person feel that somebody is still willing to have something to do with them, and would like to help them to be nicer—if you can make the person understand that, I think it is doing a great deal more for them than it would to put money in their pockets. And besides, Bertha Macy doesn't need money, but she does need some kind of friendly help. She looks awfully. I think she is very unhappy, and I am just as sorry for her as I can be. There is the breakfast bell! Oh, Anne, I am not half ready!"

"Well, I am. The moral of it is, don't give lectures on charity while you are dressing for breakfast. You little provoking saint! You maddening little angel!"

Anne helped her to finish her toilet, and the result was that they were both late, but not so late as Dolly would have been had she been left alone. And in spite of Anne's jeers and vehemence on the other side of the question, Dolly hoped that her words had made some slight impression. It was very hard to measure one's success in an argument with Anne. She usually protested until the last moment and would then capitulate in the most unexpected manner, but with a thoroughness that left nothing to be desired.

That Monday morning seemed especially long

to Sydney. She knew that there must be a letter from her mother in the morning's mail, but as usual this was not distributed as soon as it was received, so it was not until the noon recess that her suspense came to an end. The letter was then given to her, and she ran up to her room to read it where she knew she would be safe from interruption.

It was short but it told her all she wished to know. Mrs. Stuart and Philip would take the morning train on Tuesday, arriving at Kingsbridge at five o'clock that afternoon. Sydney would meet them at the station and go with them to the hotel, and would spend the evening with them either there or at Braithwaite Hall. She could tell them when they had arrived what it would be best to do. It might be unwise for Mrs. Braithwaite to see them that night.

"I have written to Miss Wickersham," wrote Mrs. Stuart, "asking permission for you to be with us as much as possible while we are there, though of course I do not wish to interfere with your studies in any way. I told her that important family matters were bringing us. If she does not already know about it I think it would be well for you to tell her. We must try to take it all as naturally as possible. I think I have made a mistake in that way in the past. Now that the opportunity

for Phil to escape from his morbidness has come, we must do everything to encourage him to believe that his life has not been spoiled, and that he is not to consider himself forever to be different from other people. My dear child, it seems to me a wonderful thing that you should have gone to Kingsbridge to school, and so have become acquainted with Mrs. Braithwaite! Truly we have much to be grateful for. Phil is very quiet about it, but I can see that it means a great deal to him. I hope, I venture to believe, my dear daughter, that the time is at hand when the heavy cloud that for so long has darkened our boy's life is about to be lifted, and you have helped to bring it about."

There was nothing in the letter in regard to Mrs. Tracy's invitation, but Sydney remembered that she did not send the address in time for her mother to have received Mrs. Tracy's note before she wrote. To think that in about thirty hours her mother and brother would be in Kingsbridge! It was almost too wonderful to be believed. She wished that she might relieve Mrs. Braithwaite's anxiety, but she had no time then to run in next door to tell her that they were coming and get back for the opening of the afternoon session, for recess was now over. It was more difficult than ever to fix her attention upon her lessons after having received this letter, and as the first was the

hated arithmetic poor Sydney had a hard time—and so did her teacher.

The result of it was that she failed miserably and was informed that she must make up for her delinquencies by “doing” several extra examples before the next day.

“You may choose your own time for them, Miss Stuart,” said Miss Abby tartly, for she was tired, “but I should advise you to stay in this afternoon until you have accomplished them. There is no reason why you should not understand these rules perfectly. We have been over them again and again, and it seems to me incredible that a girl of your age and your usual good sense in other matters should exercise her reason so little in mathematics. You have behaved this morning precisely as though your mind were full of some other subject. Now there is no other subject that can possibly be of as much importance as the duty of the hour, whatever it may be, and one of the most important branches of education is to learn to eliminate all unnecessary thoughts from the mind and concentrate our attention on the matter to be considered. Concentration—concentration, young ladies. It is that which I would inculcate. Elimination, concentration.”

Miss Abby's voice had grown louder. She forgot that she had begun her remarks by a reproof

for Sydney and slipped into a general address which she declaimed to all within hearing. The schoolroom was almost empty at the time, for there were classes in session in other rooms. Only the class in arithmetic was there to hear, and one or two girls who were occupied at their desks in other parts of the room. Bertha Macy was one of these.

"Therefore, Miss Stuart," continued Miss Abby, once more becoming personal, "I would suggest that after dinner you return to your desk and devote yourself to mastering these simple examples."

Return to her desk ! When she had been counting upon going in to see Mrs. Braithwaite to tell her that her mother and brother were coming ! It was most provoking, and the worst of it was that she felt perfectly sure that she should never understand those silly examples which looked so easy at the first glance but were really so full of pitfalls for the unwary. However, there was no help for it. Though Miss Abby had put her words into the form of a suggestion, they were really meant for a command, and Sydney very well knew that the schoolroom would be inspected later to discover if she were at her desk, or, if she should venture to go next door, her movements would be observed, commented upon and remembered. There was

THE FRIENDSHIP OF ANNE 301

nothing to be done but return to the empty schoolroom (always an especially dreary place in the afternoon because the frosted windows faced the east) and devote herself to a task which she hated.

CHAPTER XXI

SHE seated herself, got out her book, paper and pencil, and began.

"A is about to build a house. He buys land which is taxed at thirty cents a foot, which is at the rate of eight cents on the dollar. What then does he pay for five acres of land if the owner wishes to sell it at an advance of \$3,000 above its taxed valuation?"

Was there ever anything so puzzling? Thirty cents a foot. It was thirty hours from twelve o'clock that day before her mother and Phil should reach Kingsbridge. At what hour then would they arrive? Oh, no, it was not that. "A is about to build a house." Who is A? And why on earth does he build a house on land so strangely sold? Who buys land by the foot? She determined to multiply thirty by eight. This accomplished, she surveyed the result. What should she do with the two hundred and forty? And was it dollars, or feet? No, it was cents. Two hundred and forty. Just about that many miles perhaps from Kingsbridge to New York. Oh, it would not do to think of that! She would try the

next example. It was about B. Perhaps B's affairs would be more interesting and more sensible than those of A.

"B is a horse-car conductor. He is obliged to punch a hole in a blue card for every fare, or in a red card for each transfer fare received. Fares are five cents, transfers seven. At the end of the day he should hand in \$37.19. Of this seven-tenths were fares, the rest transfers. How many punches of each kind had he made?"

This was worse still. What a miserable life that of a horse-car conductor must be! Far worse than that of a pupil at the Wickersham School, if, at the end of his day's labor, he must do a succession of such fearful problems as this. There was no sense in it, nor in any of these mathematical fictions. Sydney laid her head upon her arms, which rested on the despised arithmetic. There was no use in trying any more. Who cares, what possible difference could it make, how many fares that dreadful conductor collected, when Phil was coming to see Mrs. Braithwaite? And how impatient Mrs. Braithwaite must be to hear when he was coming, and she could not go to tell her because she was obliged to build houses and gather fares!

She had reached a very low state of mind when she became conscious that some one had entered

the room and was standing looking at her. She was aware of the steady gaze before she raised her head. She found that it was Bertha Macy.

"Are you doing your arithmetic?" asked Bertha. Her face was paler than usual and her eyes were red. Any girl but Bertha Macy would have been suspected of having cried a good deal, but one never connected tears with Bertha. Not that she was gay, but because of a certain hardness that was habitual with her.

"I am trying to do it," replied Sydney in a depressed voice, "but I can't make head or tail of it. It seems to me people in arithmetic do such silly things. I have given up two as hopeless. Now I am going to try the third. It is a man named C who lays ties on a railroad. There are so many ties to a mile, and he does so many an hour. He gets paid so much at the end of the day, working at the rate of so many cents an hour. How many ties had he laid and how much money did he make on each mile? Why, I should be crazy if I were C."

Her tone was so despairing that any one but Bertha would have been amused.

"I think I can help you," said Bertha. "If you will let me," she added after an instant's pause.

"I should be perfectly thankful if you would!"

exclaimed Sydney. "It is awfully good of you. Don't you want to be out?"

"No, I don't care to go out to-day." She did not say that she had no one to walk with. Julia Clark had gone with Miss Wickersham to see the doctor, and none of the other girls had encouraged her to be with them.

"Dear me, I wish I could go out! I feel as if I must stay in for the rest of my life, for I shall never be able to see through these horrors."

"Oh, yes, you will. Now this first one. It isn't so bad as it looks. You needn't think of that eight cents yet. First find out how many feet there are in an acre. See? And for five acres——"

"Why, five times as much, of course." They worked in silence a few minutes. "And then if he wanted \$3,000 more than the taxed valuation you just add—why, Bertha, how easy! Is that really the answer? But why do they ask it in such a queer way?"

"Just to puzzle you. They often set traps like that."

"It is a very mean thing to do, I think. I never should have thought of this way of doing. How clever you are!"

This opinion was justified still further, for Bertha explained the others in as clear a way, and

so on down the list. She really proved herself to be an excellent teacher, for her help consisted in setting forth the problem in clear language and then allowing Sydney to work it out herself. At the end of half an hour they had finished the task.

"I do think you are very kind to help me," said Sydney gratefully. "I am ever and ever so much obliged to you."

"You needn't be," said Bertha, speaking in an abrupt way. She did not look at Sydney, but was playing with the charms on her watch-chain. "I did you a lot of harm, and I want to tell you I am sorry."

"Oh, Bertha, you needn't say anything about that! It is all over, and things are coming out right at last."

"Well, I *am* sorry. I don't believe I ever should have told you so if it hadn't been for Dolly Fearing. She has been nice to me, but everybody else has—has dropped me. Dolly said I ought to tell you. Of course I believed it was true, what I said at Anne's party, and of course I didn't know that was your brother there. I thought his last name was Murray."

She did not mention the anonymous letters, and Sydney did not remind her of them, although she thought of them. They had really done more

harm than the speech at the Talbots', but that, too, was all a thing of the past now.

"I am not coming back here to school next year," said Bertha. "I am going to a day school in New York. I like the girls better there. I know some of them, and I don't think they are as changeable as some of the girls here. I won't mention any names, but you must know the one I mean. You have found her so, too. But really, I am sorry I made any trouble for you. I don't think you ever liked me when we were rooming together."

"And you didn't like me either, Bertha. You know you didn't!"

"Well, perhaps I didn't."

"But I think you are very kind to help me with these examples."

"I wanted to. I really did."

"Perhaps we shall like each other better now."

"Perhaps so."

And then they parted.

Slowly the hours wore away. Night came and passed, Tuesday dawned and it also passed. It was two o'clock, three, four. Would the last hour never go? It seemed longer than any. But that too dragged itself away, and now it was time to go to the station to meet the travelers. Miss Wickersham had been told the whole story and was will-

ing to make everything easy for Sydney. Miss Abby, when she heard it, felt that there had been some reason for Sydney's lack of concentration on the subject of arithmetic the day before, and was rather more lenient in the class of Tuesday. Miss Jennie came to Sydney's room and kissed her.

"My dear," she whispered, "I am so glad for you!"

It was not surprising that the girls loved Miss Jennie. She seemed more like a human being than did her automatic and austere sisters, and often she was actually guilty of calling the pupils by their first names, and when she did this their names sounded to them like a caress. She was at the front door when Sydney started on her walk to the station.

"I am glad it is such a bright afternoon," she said. "Kingsbridge looks attractive on a day like this and we want your mother and brother to like it here. You will not be back until nine, I hear! Well, Sydney dear, I am glad you are going to have an outing. You are a good girl and deserve it. Such a good composition as that was you handed in Friday! You will hear something nice to-morrow."

This was delightful news to receive, for the compositions were intended for a special test this time. No doubt she would get "honorable men-

tion," from what Miss Jennie said, and that would be pleasant to have happen while her mother was there. So it was with a light heart that Sydney set forth. She glanced in as she passed the Braithwaite place, but no one was to be seen. She had already run in there once before that day and had found the Little Lady perfectly composed but evidently awaiting Philip's coming with great impatience. She asked that they should come there that evening as soon as they should have finished supper. Primitive hours were still kept in Kingsbridge, and dinner was eaten in the middle of the day. Mrs. Stuart had declined Mrs. Tracy's invitation, feeling that it would be better for every reason for them to stay at the hotel, so rooms had been engaged and they were to go there from the train.

And now Sydney was at the station and there were yet ten minutes before the train was due. It was a fine evening in April. The day had been mild and the sun was setting in a clear west, with scarcely a cloud to catch its glory. The usual collection of vehicles was drawn up at the station platform, and one or two persons had gathered to take the train which would presently start for Boston and the intervening places. Kingsbridge was at the end of the branch road, and the train which was due now would run immediately back to the

Junction. Sydney watched and waited, and presently the shriek of a locomotive told her that they were coming, actually coming! And then the train drew up and in a moment one of the dear familiar figures alighted. It was Philip, and now he would turn to help the little mother. But no, he came straight towards Sydney, and he was smiling at her, so nothing alarming could have happened, but where was her mother?

"Mother couldn't come," he said. "Amabel has measles. She's not very sick, but mother couldn't leave. I know you're awfully disappointed, and so am I. But Sydney, I want to tell you right off that—that—everything looks brighter. It's all owing to you. So this is Kingsbridge, is it? Funny little place it seems after New York."

"But Phil, isn't mother coming at all? Oh, I am so disappointed! And are you sure Amabel isn't very sick?"

"Scarcely sick at all. Hasn't got 'em bad, the way we had them. Mother didn't think of its being measles until this morning, and there was no time to let you know."

In spite of her disappointment about her mother it was delightful to see Phil, and to see him in these unusual good spirits. The expression of his face was different and so was the tone of his voice. Surely the shadow had already begun to lift.

They were walking towards the hotel when Mrs. Tracy drove up to the post-office, just as they passed it, and stopped. She greeted Sydney, who drew Phil towards the carriage and introduced him. "And mother hasn't come!" she said sadly.

"And you are alone?" said Mrs. Tracy. "Then you must certainly come home with me. I shall take no refusal."

Before they realized quite what was happening they were seated in Mrs. Tracy's carriage and were spinning towards the big house on High Street.

It was certainly very much more agreeable to be in this pleasant home than at the dismal little hotel, and Mrs. Tracy, understanding boys perfectly, even one who was unlike most boys, soon seemed to Philip like an old friend. Her sons being absent, there was no one at dinner but the two Stuarts and herself. Philip was quiet, but perfectly at ease. Neither his morbidness nor his reticent nature had ever made him awkward or self-conscious. On the contrary he appeared much older than his years, and he carried himself with the grave dignity of a grown man who had already encountered some of the sorrows of life. He was certainly very different from her own boys or their friends who came to stay there, jolly rollicking fellows, who were always ready for some kind of fun and who made the house ring with laughter

and gaiety, but Mrs. Tracy liked him and felt a certain respect for him.

"I am so glad I arrived just in time to catch you," she said, when they rose from the table. "It would have been forlorn for you and Sydney to be at the hotel to-night without your mother, and as for me, I should have been entirely alone here, so you have done me a kindness by coming. I hope you will stay several days with me. Now don't say you cannot. You must stay over to-morrow night anyway, and then we can discuss your later plans. Mrs. Braithwaite will want to see you again, so you certainly cannot leave to-morrow. It is time for you to go there now, for it will not do to keep her waiting. No doubt she is sadly impatient to see you. Sydney, would you rather drive or walk? Thomas can take you there if you wish. The horses don't get half enough exercise."

But they preferred to walk. It was a fine moonlight night and walking would be a pleasure. It was decided that Sydney should not return to Mrs. Tracy's, as it would be time to go back to the school when their call was over. Mrs. Tracy drew her aside.

"I want to persuade your brother to stay over at least to-morrow night," she whispered. "We'll have Anne and some of the others to supper."

"Oh, I should like to have him meet Anne!"

"Of course. Now make him stay."

And then the brother and sister set forth.

The moon was almost full. A mist hung over the valley, but one could see the winding river, and the outlines of the hills beyond. Near at hand the trees threw black shadows across the road, while the white houses of Kingsbridge shone out in keen relief. Neither Philip nor Sydney spoke as they walked quickly along High Street and then followed the more country—like road which lay past Braithwaite Hall and the Wickersham School. Presently they turned in between the old stone gate posts and followed the curving avenue which led to the house. Sydney remembered that other moonlight night when she had gone on the quest commanded by the Kay Cue See. What an odd thing that was to do, and how had she ever had the temerity to enter another person's house in that manner! This time there were lights in many parts of the house. Evidently it had been illuminated in their honor, for never before had there been so many gleaming windows.

They rang the bell and almost immediately the door was opened by Eliza.

"Walk up-stairs, if you please," she said. "The mistress is waiting for you."

To Sydney's keen ear her voice sounded more

friendly than usual. She glanced at Phil as they stood for a moment in the dimly lighted hall while they removed their wraps. His face had grown very pale, and his hands were shaking.

"Sydney," he whispered. "I don't feel as if I could see her! I did it! It was all my fault. She *can't* forgive me. It is impossible."

"Go right up, Phil," said Sydney calmly. She was frightened, however. Suppose Phil should give out at the last minute, and really refuse to go up-stairs! It would not be surprising. She longed for her mother's presence more than ever.

"No, I cannot go up," said Phil again. He actually began to put on the overcoat which he had just taken off.

"Phil, this is nonsense," said Sydney, drawing the coat away from him. "Mrs. Braithwaite is waiting to see you. You owe it to her. It would be very selfish to run away now, as well as cowardly. Remember she is old and blind, and she has set her heart on having you come to her. Come right up. Don't wait a minute."

She put her hand in his arm and tried to pull him towards the stairs. He yielded at last and they went up to the next floor, Sydney leading him. He seemed scarcely able to see. They walked to the door of the sitting-room and she knocked softly.

"Come!" said a voice within, and she opened the door and then thrust Philip in before her and closed it again. A sudden thought told her it would be easier for him to enter alone.

And Philip, left alone, regained his composure in an instant, for what he saw banished his hesitation and renewed his courage. The room as usual was brilliantly lighted. Standing at one end, her face turned towards him and so full of feeling that even the sightless eyes were expressive, was the Little Lady. She was so very small and slight and fragile that in figure she was like a girl. Her face was tender with anticipation, and with the memory of her grandson. Her sorrows had marked it, but her sweet spirit had turned the sorrow lines into those of a deep rare beauty.

"Is that Phil at last?" she said. "My boy, I have waited for you so long! You were Braith's dearest friend, the last one who was with him. I am glad you have come to me after all these years."

A little later Sydney, coming in quietly, found them sitting hand in hand, and Phil was telling Braith's grandmother of all that they used to do together in the old days on the shores of Chesapeake Bay. Sydney had never seen either face, the old or the young, so happy. Of a truth, the shadow had lifted.

CHAPTER XXII

IT is difficult in real life to keep up with the flight of time and to grasp the fact that the weeks, months or years have flown by since some well-remembered event, or that actually we are all somewhat older than we once were, and that the boys and girls we knew in our youth but have not seen since are now men and women of mature years. But in reading a book one has but to turn a page and Presto! the schoolgirl of yesterday doing her examples in arithmetic is now a young woman of twenty-three and the college boys are out in the big maelstrom of business, and all the world is grown up.

It was summer. To be exact, it was the very end of June, and once more the scene was the Grand Central Station in New York. Crowds of passengers were standing in line at the ticket offices or hurrying through the doors which led to their trains, just as they had done the day Sydney Stuart went to the Wickersham School and as they had been doing without intermission ever since, for a railroad station is perhaps the one place in the world which never knows emptiness or rest. Again a group of persons had gathered to await

the calling of the train for Kingsbridge. It consisted of Sydney Stuart and Phil, Anne Talbot and Alec Tracy. They were on their way to visit Alec's mother, who was giving a house party.

Anne looked very much as she did when she was a schoolgirl. Perhaps she was even prettier. Her animated face which changed with every passing mood or even thought, was full of charm. She was very tall and as usual she was well dressed. Sydney was tall too but her stature was not so noticeable as Anne's. The years had made a greater change in her face than in that of her friend. Life was a more serious affair for Sydney than it had yet proved for Anne. Her mother had died and Margaret had married, so Sydney kept house for her three brothers and Amabel. Bob was engaged. He had not yet made his fortune but his marriage was to take place before very long and it would make considerable difference in Sydney's housekeeping when he no longer contributed his share towards the family expenses. However, no one thought of that, for they were all delighted that he was going to be happy himself and give them a new sister whom they liked and were glad to welcome to the family circle.

The problems which Sydney had already been called upon to meet had given her a look of thoughtfulness, but this expression had added to

the beauty of her face, in which the color came and went with the same frequency that had been such a source of amusement to the girls at school. It was evident to the most casual observer that Alec Tracy thought her very pretty indeed for he seldom looked at any one else when she was near. He was carrying her bag and umbrella now, and Phil had Anne's.

"Do you remember the first time we ever met?" said Anne, laughing. "I left my bag on the floor here and you ran after me with it, Phil."

"I should think I did," rejoined Philip. "It took all the courage I possessed to do it."

"No one would ever have suspected that. You had the assurance of a man of the world. I was tremendously impressed. I was with Dolly and Gertrude King, I remember, and they teased me unmercifully about it. Oh, how funny it is to think of those old days! Syd, do you remember your first journey to Kingsbridge?"

They had reached the train and were in their seats when Anne leaned over and asked Sydney this question.

"I do indeed! I was so afraid of you all, but I had picked out you as the person I most wanted to know. You came and spoke to Bertha Macy and me after we changed at the Junction. Oh, Bertha Macy! What a time we had with her!"

"She certainly was about the limit!" said Alec. "I shall never forget her that night at our house when she and old Merry sat on the stairs. I wonder what has become of her."

"Since when have you been so interested in the fair Bertha?" asked Anne. "But I can tell you the latest news of her as you are so anxious to know. I met her, the other day on Broadway. She was walking with a very elegant looking creature, a man. She had a big bunch of violets and a conscious expression. She scarcely deigned to recognize me. Just gave her eyelids a sort of a flicker. I have been practicing it before the glass ever since. When I wish to just escape giving the cut direct I am going to flicker my eyelids. This way."

She gave them an exhibition of her new accomplishment that was most effective.

"I can tell you more about her than that," said Sydney. "I met her in a store. To my surprise she came up and spoke to me. I was perfectly amazed, for usually she flickers at me too. The whole thing was so funny. She put out two fingers at me which I meekly received. 'Oh, Miss Stuart,' she said. 'I haven't seen you since I left the Wickersham School, but you haven't changed in the least. How are all the girls? Is Anne Talbot engaged yet?' I said not that I

knew of. 'Mercy!' she said. 'That must be a fearful trial to her. Anne always made such a dead set at all the boys!'

"Oh! how outrageous!" cried Anne, laughing. "And for you to repeat it, Sydney, before these two boys! What else?"

"Nothing more about you, but she asked about the others, and I told her we were all going to Kingsbridge to stay with Mrs. Tracy and have a sort of a reunion. I wish you could have seen her face, but she said she always thought Kingsbridge such a stupid place, and was Alec Tracy as full of airs as ever?"

This turned the laugh on Alec, who enjoyed it thoroughly himself.

"Was that all she said?" asked Anne.

"Oh, no, she told me she was going abroad and that Count von somebody or other was to be of the party."

"That must have been he I saw with her! He looked like a foreigner."

"Of course. I think that was the reason she spoke to me. She wanted us to know it."

"Oh, you girls!" said Alec. "How you do pick each other to pieces."

"Well, I like that!" said Anne, who in spite of being grown up and in spite of her mother's disapproval, still lapsed into slang phrases occa-

sionally. "As if you were not the one who always gives a dig at Bertha Macy! Sydney, we won't tell him any more gossip. He'll be sorry enough not to hear about—you know whom! I'll tell you about it when we change at the Junction. Let us arrange to sit together then."

"How natural that sounds, arranging to sit together when we get to the Junction, just as we always did in going back to school."

And finally the Junction was reached, but by that time the arrangement had been forgotten, or at least it was overlooked, and Phil took his seat by Anne, and Alec by Sydney, quite as a matter of course.

Surely Kingsbridge had never looked lovelier than it did that June evening. The sun would not be setting for an hour yet beyond the distant hills, and its slanting rays fell upon the winding river, and shone through the elm trees, now in the full foliage of summer, which arched and met above the village streets. The gardens, too, for which the old town was famous, were at the height of summer bloom, and roses of all shades, larkspur, mignonette, geraniums and all the flowers that grow, massed together in old-fashioned luxuriance and without the modern regard for schemes of color, filled the air with fragrance. There could not be a lovelier, more restful place at which to arrive after a long day in a railroad train. The

Tracys' carriage was waiting at the station with the same Thomas to drive the bays who had driven for so many years. The roomy carriage was large enough for all, and presently they were spinning along beneath the elms and over the wide smooth road to Mrs. Tracy's house. She was waiting for them on the piazza and with her were two persons who quickly disappeared within doors as the carriage turned into the avenue which led up to the house, before the travelers had time to see who they were. In fact their presence had made no impression whatever upon the newcomers, who were entirely absorbed in the pleasure of getting there. They lingered for a few minutes on the piazza, and then Mrs. Tracy suggested that the girls might like to go to their rooms and refresh themselves after the journey.

"We shall have supper earlier than usual to-night," she said, "for I know you must be hungry. Anne, you are to have the yellow room and Sydney the blue. You both know just where they are and how to find them."

The two girls ran up-stairs, Mrs. Tracy following more sedately. Each one turned to the room designated, and each one paused on the threshold with an exclamation, or rather a scream, of delight. Seated in Anne's room was Dolly Fearing, in Sydney's was Elsie Brent.

"Where did you come from?" cried Anne.
"Sydney, who do you think is here?"

"But who do you think is here?" called Sydney, and then such a greeting ensued, such a hubbub of laughter and talk, that the boys came running upstairs to find out what had happened.

"Are we going to find some more of the old crowd waiting in our rooms, mother?" said Alec.
"I think it wouldn't be a bad idea to have Fred up in my den."

"Wait a little longer," said Mrs. Tracy. "I should have managed it that way if I had had my way, but unfortunately Fred could not leave in time to get here before you. He and Hugh will be here to-morrow."

"But, Dolly, how did you manage to keep it from me that you were coming?" asked Anne.
"I saw you two weeks ago and have heard from you lots of times since."

"Oh, it is easy enough to keep things out of a letter," said Dolly. "It is only when I am with you that I can't resist telling you things. I have been staying with Elsie, you know, and she has kept a strict watch over me. Mrs. Tracy planned it all, and it worked in beautifully with Elsie's invitation to me. I have had such a lovely time in Cambridge. We went to Class Day and it was simply perfect. We came up here yesterday."

In the meantime Elsie was telling Sydney very much the same thing, but in her own quiet way. Her great brown eyes followed Sydney as she moved about the room. She had become a fine-looking woman, and although she could never be called pretty, her face was full of character. She looked much older than her years, but she was one whose face would change but little as she grew older and she would probably seem as youthful at thirty, or even forty, as she did at twenty-three.

"Oh, I am so glad you are here!" exclaimed Sydney, pausing long enough in her preparations for supper to throw her arms around Elsie's neck and give her a good hug. "You are just the same as ever, you quiet, undemonstrative old Elsie! I know you are glad to see me and yet you have scarcely kissed me. Oh, Elsie, do you remember the first night we ever spent in this room? The day Alec rescued us and carried you in a dead faint into the house? That was so romantic. By all the laws of romance you and he ought to have fallen in love with each other long ago."

"Thank you kindly," said Elsie with a humorous look in her eyes. "It is just as well we haven't, I think. From what I hear from both Fred and Dolly, Alec has other plans."

"Fred and Dolly must know a great deal," rejoined Sydney, applying herself with much as-

siduity to the tying of a belt ribbon. "Elsie, do you remember what a state I was in about Anne, when we stayed here the first time? I thought if I did not get back her friendship, life would really not be worth living. She certainly was fascinating then, just as she is now."

"I was thinking about all that only the other day," said Elsie. "Do you know that really the friendship of Anne has made a great difference to a lot of people? It was because Bertha Macy was so anxious for it that we had all that trouble in school, and then you felt so badly about it that you and I became friends! I don't believe we ever should have done so otherwise."

"And it has had more effect even than all that," said Sydney. "She and Phil have been friends ever since he first came up to see Mrs. Braithwaite. You know Mrs. Tracy asked her here to supper the night Phil was here, and I think meeting her had just as much influence over him at that time as the other affair did. I mean the discovery that Mrs. Braithwaite was so fond of him. That of course was the saving of him, but Anne's coming into his life at the same time knocked all the morbidness out of him. She is so gay and light-hearted and full of fun and life. Oh, Elsie, I can't help wishing sometimes that she were not so rich, or Phil not so poor!"

"Why should that make any difference? Why isn't it better than if they were both very rich or both very poor?"

"Oh, I don't know, but it does. Your way of putting it sounds much more sensible, but young men—the right kind of young men—seem to feel they can't ask rich girls to marry them. At least I know Phil feels that way."

"If I were very rich," said Elsie slowly, "and the man I loved and who loved me were very poor, I know I should think it a poor kind of love of his that didn't have sufficient trust in me to allow him to ask me to marry him. Why should a man care what the world says, if the girl he loves understands? Money ought to be a blessing, but if it prevents Phil from speaking to Anne, it seems to me more like a curse."

"Well, perhaps it will all come right in time," said Sydney. "He is so young yet, though he seems older than any of us. He is so dear and unselfish and thoughtful for others. There never was such a brother as Phil, but I would gladly give him up to Anne. She has always had so much attention that she might marry almost any one. There are at least two New York men who I know are tremendously in earnest, but Anne just laughs and goes on her way. And there was some one else I happen to know about from an-

other city. But I can't help thinking that it is really Phil whom she cares for, though she is so proud that she shields herself behind all her fun and laughter so that not many people would guess it."

"I am sure it will all come right, Sydney. You needn't worry about that."

"I'm not worrying, at least not about that. I am wondering how Amabel and Murray are getting on without me. Dear little Amabel hated so to have me go, although she is very proud of being left in charge, and she is going to pour out the boys' coffee herself. Margaret is going to look after them, but Margaret is so absorbed in her own family that we don't take much satisfaction in her. There, I am ready at last, and we ought to go down. Oh, you dear old Elsie, I am *so* glad you are here!"

The next morning Sydney and Phil went to see Mrs. Braithwaite. Both had been in Kingsbridge several times since Sydney finished school, Philip's visits being for the sole purpose of seeing the Little Lady, whose affection for him had deepened with the years. They found her in the garden. She was in a dainty white dress, and a lace scarf was draped over her head. Seated in a rustic arm-chair, surrounded by the masses of roses now in full bloom, she looked like some rare picture. The old house formed a gloomy background, but

both it and the place itself were in a better state of repair than when Sydney first visited the blind woman. She seemed more like other people now, less remote and odd, and it was undoubtedly caused by the new interest that had come into her life in the person of Philip. Her grandson's friend, while he could not in the nature of things be to her what Braith had been, had become very dear to her, and she looked forward to his coming as she would have done to that of another grandson.

Sydney stayed with them but a short time as Alec Tracy had asked her to go on the river, and it was not long before he called for her. When they were left alone Mrs. Braithwaite put out her hand and touched Phil's arm.

"My boy," she said, "how goes it with you?"

"Pretty well, Mrs. Braithwaite," he answered.

"Of course in any profession it is uphill work at first, but I think I've got it in me."

"I know you have it in you! I have been told so. You need not think I have sat here idle all these years hearing nothing!"

"What have you been doing and hearing?" he asked. His manner was very tender with her. He loved her not only because she was Braith's grandmother, but because she had been such a good friend to himself.

"Oh, I have made inquiries. I have ways of

finding out! I happen to know from some one high in authority that a certain Mr. Philip Stuart is sure some day to be a very excellent architect. In fact he is already spoken of as one of our most talented young men."

It was sad that she could not see the quick color rise in Phil's face and the happy expression of his eyes when she said this. But she heard his voice.

"I am afraid you are too much prejudiced in my favor," he said. "You read more meaning into Mr. Dennison's words than he ever meant."

"No, I don't. And I have heard the same from others, too. And now, Phil, there is something else I wish to speak of. Have you said anything to Anne yet?"

He moved quickly. He almost rose to his feet. Then he sat down again, and when he spoke his voice was very quiet.

"No, Mrs. Braithwaite, I haven't. I can't speak to her. As I told you before, I can't ask a girl like Anne, who could marry any one, to wait years and years for a penniless fellow like me."

"But does she want to marry 'any one'?"

"I—I hope not!"

"Ah, my dear, that is just it! You hope not, and yet you have not the courage to go to her and ask her to wait for you. For that is what it is,

Phil. You are cowardly about it. Although you know, and you know Anne knows, that you do not want her money and would rather that she had none, you are afraid of what the world will say. You do not think of her side of the matter. Would not she rather have you tell her that you love her, if, as I think is the case, she cares for you? At any rate, you can at least ask her, and if she does not, take it like a man. I knew some one once whose whole life was spoiled because she had so much money that her lover was afraid to ask her to marry him. I want you to do it, Phil. I am getting old, and I want to see you engaged to Anne before I die. Promise me."

And before he left her that morning he had promised.

He went to see her every day during his visit in Kingsbridge, but nothing more was said between them on the subject. He told her all that they were doing and the good times they were having and she listened eagerly, as full of interest as though she were herself young and vigorous. She asked no questions, not even of Sydney who often ran in to see her. It was a project that was very dear to her heart, and she had made certain plans in connection with it that were not to be spoken of until all was arranged but which she was very desirous of seeing carried into effect.

The house party had been invited to stay a week, which was all the time that the young men could spare from their professions or business, and the girls too had other engagements to fill. It was a week of unalloyed pleasure for all. Never had the weather been so beautiful, and day after day dawned clear and not too warm for the thorough enjoyment of all the picnics, drives, river trips and good times that were planned and successfully carried out.

The day before they were to leave, Phil came again to Braithwaite Hall. It was late in the afternoon and again the Little Lady was sitting in her garden. This time Anne was with him.

He knelt on the grass beside the rustic chair and took the dear old hands in his.

"You are my best friend," he said.

"Have you asked her, Phil?"

"I have asked her, and she has come herself to tell you her answer. Anne is here, Mrs. Braithwaite."

The Little Lady rose and held out her arms. "My dear," she said softly, "you have made me very happy."

"Ah, no, Mrs. Braithwaite," said Anne in her quick impulsive way, "it is you who have made *me* happy! Phil has told me how you made him promise to speak to me, and that he never would

have done it until he had made his fortune if it had not been for you. Wasn't he a foolish boy? As if it made any difference which of us has the money! Mrs. Braithwaite, you scarcely know me, and yet what a good friend you have been to me! Will you always be my friend?"

"Yes, my dear," said the Little Lady. Then she turned towards Phil and took his hand. "Though I have not met her often, Phil, I know very well what Anne is. I hope I may always have the friendship of Anne. And I am very, very glad, my dear boy, that you are to have something even more precious than her friendship."

And while this was taking place in the old garden, Alec and Sydney, floating down the river in his canoe, dreamed that all the world was made for them alone, and that this summer day had no other purpose in its dawning save to bring them happiness.

And the sky was blue, and the west wind stirred the leaves, and the little birds sang joyously, and life was young, and very beautiful, and full of hope.

THE END











18 1940



